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ABSTRACT

This literature review assesses the state-of-the-art in research on Asian American students in public schools who are at risk of academic failure. Risk factors examined are language background, ability, history of schooling, timing and reasons for coming to the United States, emotional trauma and vulnerability, ethnic group affiliation, identity, motivation, and sense of self-efficacy. Interventions are examined that are designed exclusively for Asian American students or include Asian American participants. The review does not focus on high-achieving students and generally does not deal with Japanese American and Asian Indian students, who are not, as a group, at risk of school failure. The review consists of seven sections: (1) "Introduction"; (2) "Background Information on Asian Americans"; (3) "Asian American Students in the Public Schools"; (4) "Factors that Place Asian American Students at Risk"; (5) "Intervention"; (6) "An Assessment of the Literature"; and (7) "Conclusion." (Contains 264 references.) (SLD)

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**CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS PLACED AT RISK**

Johns Hopkins University & Howard University

# ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT RISK

## A Literature Review

**Sau-Fong Siu**
**Wheelock College**

**Report No. 8**

**December 1996**

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## The Center

Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that are based on a sorting paradigm in which some students receive high-expectations instruction while the rest are relegated to lower quality education and lower quality futures. The sorting perspective must be replaced by a "talent development" model that asserts that all children are capable of succeeding in a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support.

The mission of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) is to conduct the research, development, evaluation, and dissemination needed to transform schooling for students placed at risk. The work of the Center is guided by three central themes — ensuring the success of all students at key development points, building on students' personal and cultural assets, and scaling up effective programs — and conducted through seven research and development programs and a program of institutional activities.

CRESPAR is organized as a partnership of Johns Hopkins University and Howard University, in collaboration with researchers at the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of California at Los Angeles, University of Oklahoma, University of Chicago, Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation, WestEd Regional Laboratory, University of Memphis, and University of Houston-Clear Lake.

# Abstract

High academic achievement is closely linked in the public's mind with Asian American students, but many Asian American ethnic subgroups and individuals remain at risk. The main purpose of this literature review is to assess the state-of-the-art in research on Asian American students in the public school system who are at risk of academic failure. The risk factors examined are the language backgrounds and abilities, history of schooling, timing and reasons for coming to the United States, emotional trauma and vulnerability, ethnic group affiliation and identity, motivation, and sense of self-efficacy. Interventions are examined that are designed exclusively for Asian American students or include Asian American participants.

The author finds that there is a lack of comprehensive and reliable data on the academic achievement of Asian American students and confusion around the designation of ethnic subgroups, and that research on intervention programs seldom gives a clear picture of what works, with which ethnic group, and at which age level.

# Table of Contents


**I. Introduction** ..... 1
- Purpose and Scope of this Literature Review ..... 1
- Definitions of Terms ..... 2
- Search Strategy and Organization of this Literature Review ..... 4

**II. Background Information on Asian Americans** ..... 5
- A Demographic Profile of Contemporary Asian Americans ..... 5
- History and Patterns of Immigration ..... 6
- Languages ..... 8
- Religion and Culture ..... 9
- Socioeconomic and Educational Indicators: How Asian Americans Fare ..... 9
- Theories on Asian American Achievement ..... 11
- Diversity among Asian Americans ..... 12

**III. Asian American Students in the Public Schools** ..... 14
- Enrollment Figures ..... 14
- Subgroup Differences in School Performance ..... 14
- Subgroup Differences in Dropout and At Risk Rates ..... 15

**IV. Factor that Place Asian American Students At Risk** ..... 18
- Research on Southeast Asian Students ..... 18
- How We Should Conceptualize Educational Risk ..... 19
- Risk Factors in the Individual Student Context ..... 20
- Educational Risk in the Family Context ..... 26
- Educational Risk in the Classroom and School Contexts ..... 34
- Educational Risk in the Community and Societal Contexts ..... 39

**V. Intervention** ..... 42
- Programs for Preschool and Kindergarten Children and their Families ..... 42
- Programs for Elementary School Children and their Families ..... 44
- Programs for Middle and High School Students and their Families ..... 46
- Programs for Students in All Grades ..... 53
- Family Involvement Programs for Parents in Elementary and Secondary Schools ..... 54
- Current Knowledge of Programs for LEP and Low-Literacy Students ..... 57

**VI. An Assessment of the Literature** ..... 59
- Sensitivity to Diversity among Asian Americans ..... 60
- Balance in Coverage on Populations and Issues ..... 60
- Attention to Program Evaluation Issues ..... 62
- Suggested Directions for Future Research ..... 63

**VIII. Conclusion** ..... 65

Glossary ..... 66

Page Index to Asian Ethnic Groups Referred to in the Text ..... 68

Page Index to Intervention Programs ..... 69

References ..... 70

# I. Introduction

In November, 1995 in San Diego, the College Board honored 734 National Advanced Placement Scholars; 218 (30%) of them were Asian/Pacific Americans (*College Board awards...*, 1995). Given the small percentage (3%) of Asian/Pacific Americans in the U.S. population, the 30% representation in this group of high achievers is remarkable. Yet official reports from the San Francisco Unified School District indicate that for the school year 1994-1995, 27% of all dropouts in the district were Asian Americans (San Francisco Unified School District, 1995). How can these two pictures of Asian American students be reconciled? Are Asian American students superachievers or are they at risk of school failure?

High academic achievement has been so closely linked in the public's mind with Asian American students that it is difficult for many to think of them as at-risk students. Much of the literature certainly reflects this phenomenon. Just as literature on African American students is skewed toward school failure, that on Asian American students is skewed toward high achievement.

In the past ten or fifteen years, the educational achievement of Asian American students has gained the attention of many educational researchers. The literature in education and related fields concentrates mostly on the exceptional achievement of Asian American students. Many studies have explored factors that could account for the success phenomenon, from natural intelligence to Confucian values, from selective immigration to hours spent on homework. Sociohistorical explanations as well as cultural explanations have been proposed. Increasingly though, Asian American researchers have decried the "model minority" stereotype, cautioning against touting Asian American students as superachievers (e.g., Alva, 1993; Chun, 1995; Divoky, 1988; Hu, 1989; Nakanshi, 1995; Siu, 1992a; Suzuki, 1989; Takaki, 1991; Yee, 1992). Convincing evidence has been presented to show that aggregate data about Asian American success in school, such as the percentage of Asian American students enrolled in college or scoring high on the SAT, are misleading and mask those Asian American students who are not doing well. In fact, although it seldom makes news headlines, there is a serious problem of Asian American school failures.

## Purpose and Scope of this Literature Review

The main purpose of this literature review is to assess the state of the art in research on Asian American students in the public school systems who are at risk of academic failure. More specifically, this review is undertaken to answer the following questions:

- How prevalent and serious is the problem of at-risk Asian American students?
- What is currently known about the educational attainment, ethnicity, languages, socioeconomic background, immigration status and history, and cultural values of these students?
- What are some factors (personal, family, school, and societal) associated with these students' failure to achieve?
- What programs and strategies have been tried to meet the multiple needs of these students? How effective are these efforts?
- What are the gaps in our knowledge of this population?
- What kind of research should be undertaken in the future with regard to the students, their families, and educational programs?

With the focus on at-risk students, this review will not dwell on research on high-achieving Asian Americans. Also, as Japanese American and Asian Indian students, by all accounts, are not as a group at risk of school failure, this review will not give all ethnic groups among Asian Americans equal attention. The term "Asian Americans" in this review refers to U.S.-born citizens, immigrants, and refugees whose roots can be traced to East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, and the Indian subcontinent.

Due to the small percentage of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United Sates population, the two are often combined in government statistics to form one racial category. Although under-achievement and school dropout rates among Pacific Islander Americans are high, discussion of this population is outside the scope of our discussion. It is not always possible, however, to separate them out from available statistics and thus they are sometimes included in statistics used in this review.

It is beyond the scope of this review to critique the methodology of each of the article or book mentioned. Given the large variety of works reviewed, ranging from journalistic articles to exploratory case studies to surveys based on large samples, the reader should be aware of the unevenness of the quality of the research in the current literature and be prepared to seek out the original source to evaluate the validity of the findings.

## Definitions of Terms

The term "at risk" became popular in the 1980s. Despite the objections of some experts in the field of multicultural education (e.g., Nieto, 1995), the term "at risk youth" is now

commonplace among researchers, politicians, and educators. There are many definitions of "at risk." Definitions of "at risk" that focus exclusively on socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the students are potentially used to blame students for their shortcomings. It is important, therefore, to adopt an ecological view of educational risk (Johnson, 1994; Garcia, Wilkinson, & Ortiz, 1995) and to use research on at-risk students to highlight systemic failures and inequity in access to educational opportunity as well.

Dougherty (1989) defines educationally at-risk students as "those who, for a variety of reasons, do not perform well in school and who are likely to drop out" (p. 6). A dictionary of education (Shafritz, Koeppe, & Soper, 1988) defines "at risk" as "the increased probability for school failure or learning problems" (p. 43). The definition by Slavin, Karweit, and Madden (1989) states that at-risk students are those who are in danger of dropping out of school or leaving school without adequate skill levels. Thus, being at risk is not synonymous with "dropping out" but also includes graduating from high school with inadequate academic competencies. A recent press release by the Community Educational Services of San Francisco ("New partnership established to help at-risk Asian youth...," 1995) reported that although many Asian American students do not drop out, they quietly fail. Particular concern should be raised over the number of Asian American students who leave schools with proficiency in English that is less than average.

To place some parameters on this literature review, the focus will be on educational risk and on literature in education. References from the field of mental health and social work will be cited only occasionally, when there is a direct bearing on school performance. It should also be noted that researchers, school districts, and state agencies have developed their own operational definitions of "at risk," making it difficult to compare statistics and research findings on at-risk students.

To avoid redundancy, the different Asian American ethnic groups are sometimes referred to without the word "American" after each designation. For instance, "Chinese students" in this review means Chinese American students, not students in China. By using the word "American" after the word "Asian" or one of the ethnic groups, we do not imply that the subjects are all American citizens — only that they are currently in the United States. They may be documented or undocumented immigrants, refugees, or citizens. Although there is a legal and social difference between "immigrant" and "refugee," "immigrant" is the more inclusive word, and thus is used more often. Sometimes, the two groups are referred to as "foreign-born Asian Americans."

Throughout our discussion, the widely accepted acronyms LEP, FEP, and ESL will be used in lieu of "limited English proficient," "fluent English proficient," and "English as a second language," respectively. Other terms such as "Title I" (formerly known as "Chapter I"), "Title VII," "low-literacy," "pull-out ESL," "sheltered English instruction," "submersion," and "content-based ESL" are briefly explained in the Glossary at the end of this report.

## Search Strategy and Organization of this Literature Review

To ensure that no important works on Asian American at-risk students were missed, the author made use of a number of databases: ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center); American Psychological Association's *Asians in the United States: Abstracts of the Psychological and Behavioral Literature, 1967-1991*; the annual selected bibliographies published by *Amerasia Journal* (Asian American Studies Journal, University of California at Los Angeles); *Social Work Research and Abstracts*; the database of CHIME (Clearinghouse for Immigrant Education, a service of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students); and the annotated bibliography included in the 1995 publication *The Asian American Educational Experience: A Sourcebook for Teachers and Students* (Nakanishi & Nishida, 1995). In addition, a number of experts were consulted, such as the President of the National Association for the Education and Advancement of Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese Americans.

The literature review consists of seven sections: (I) Introduction; (II) Background Information on Asian Americans; (III) Asian American Students in the Public Schools; (IV) Factors that Place Asian American Students at Risk; (V) Intervention; (VI) An Assessment of the Literature; and (VII) Conclusion.

# II. Background Information on Asian Americans

## A Demographic Profile of Contemporary Asian Americans

The term "Asian American" signifies neither a race nor an ethnic group. In the context of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Asians in this country realized that, in spite of variations in religion, language, customs, countries of origin, and settlement history, the dominant society would always give them a common designation. Their physical appearance "joined Asians in a common fate in the past and will always join them in a common struggle as they make a place for themselves in the United States" (S.C. Wong, 1987, p. 124).

Our profile of Asian Americans is based largely on the 1990 census data, several overview articles (Fong & Mokuau, 1994; Min, 1995; Balgopal, 1995; Pang, 1995), the *Asian American Encyclopedia* (Ng, 1995), as well as publications by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Asian Week, Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, and UCLA Asian American Studies Center.

Asian Americans number almost 7 million people, constituting 2.9% of the United States population (*Asians in America*, 1991). They are found in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. in numbers ranging from 2,938 in South Dakota to over two million in California. The Asian American population has increased 95% from 1980 to 1990, making it the fastest growing minority group in this country (Ong & Lee, 1993, p. 11). Much of this recent increase was due to immigration. During the 1980s, Asian Pacific immigration totaled approximately two million; currently a total of 200,000 immigrants come from the Philippines, China, Korea, India, Pakistan, and Thailand every year. In addition, 50,000 Southeast Asian refugees were admitted in 1992. Barring major legislation to limit or ban immigration, these numbers are unlikely to change much in the near future (Hing, 1993, p. 127).

Asian Americans are concentrated in six states: California, Hawaii, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois. The largest Asian American population is found in California: over two million, constituting 9.6% of the state's population. Hawaii has the largest proportion of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders — 61.8% of the state's population. By and large, Asian Americans live in urban areas, with Chinese and Southeast Asians being the most urban.

Among Asian Americans, the largest ethnic group is the Chinese (over one and a half million, constituting 23% of all Asian Americans), followed by the Filipino, Japanese, Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, and Hmong (90,000). Besides being the largest Asian group, the Chinese also have the longest history in the United States.

## History and Patterns of Immigration

The Asian American population is mostly foreign-born; Japanese Americans are the only group with a larger U.S.-born than immigrant population. Because immigrant and refugee students are more likely to encounter problems in school than U.S.-born students, a cursory knowledge of the various subgroups' immigration history is necessary.

Throughout American history, Asian Americans came to the United States at different times and for different reasons. This very abbreviated summary is based largely on the overviews written by Balgopal (1995), Uba (1994), and Min (1995). The timing of immigration is important to note because each wave of immigrants is characterized by very different socioeconomic, educational, and occupational backgrounds. Family reunification is the cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy; thus, Asians are permitted to become immigrants if they already have family members here. Since 1965, superior education and technical expertise also make one eligible to become a permanent resident. Flight from political persecution provides grounds for being granted refugee status.

The first Asian immigrants to the United States were the Chinese. Their numbers swelled in the mid-nineteenth century due to the allure of California's Gold Rush and later the need for railroad workers. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Immigration Act of 1924 led to severe limits of the size of the Chinese population in the United States. A second wave came after the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, most notably after 1949, when the communists took over China. However, it was not until after the 1965 Immigration Act, which ended discrimination based on national origins, that significant numbers of Chinese immigrants began to arrive in the United States from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and later, from the People's Republic of China. Because the Chinese have been in this country for 150 years, there are currently fourth- and fifth-generation Chinese Americans who are very acculturated.

Japanese Americans have had over a hundred years of history in this country, first settling in Hawaii, and later in California. However, the 1924 Oriental Exclusion Act halted all immigration until the 1950s, when Japanese who married U.S. service men were allowed to come. By the time the Immigration Act of 1965 was passed, Japan had become a world economic power and there was less need on the part of her citizens to immigrate to the United States.

Asian Indians did not immigrate until 1904. During the 1920s, more than 1,000 students arrived and settled. In fact, India was one of the major source countries of foreign students in the United States. A large percentage (50%) of Indians who came as students later

adjusted their status to permanent residents. Almost all of the Indian immigrants who came after 1965 were fluent in English.

The first wave of Korean immigration was extremely brief (1903-05), involving workers in sugar and pineapple plantations in Hawaii. The second wave, ending in 1924, consisted of students and political refugees. In the post-World War II period, another wave — war brides and orphans from the Korean War — arrived. A fourth wave was the influx of Korean immigrants after the 1965 Immigration Act was passed.

The Philippines became a possession of the United States in 1899; Filipinos were therefore free to enter this country at that time until a congressional act in 1934 stopped the flow. The Filipinos' early immigration history was similar to that of the Koreans. Mostly agricultural workers, the first wave immigrated to Hawaii around 1909 and to the mainland around 1920. Like the Chinese and Koreans, Filipinos started immigrating again after World War II and increased in numbers as a result of the 1965 Immigration Act. While Chinese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants shared a similar motivation in coming to the United States — i.e., seeking a better standard of living and hoping for better educational opportunities for their children — the Filipinos differ in that their home country had been colonized by the United States for a long period of time. Even after the colonization ended, the Filipinos continued to be exposed to American culture through the U.S. military presence, which still remains.

The immigration of Southeast Asians followed a different pattern than other groups. Almost no immigrants from Southeast Asian countries came to the United States before 1975. Then, they came as refugees, fleeing the war and political excesses in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The first wave (from the fall of Saigon, 1975-79) were mostly well-educated Vietnamese with U.S. government connections. The second wave, arriving between 1979 and 1982, consisted of Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmongs — the "boat people." This wave included people with less education, less exposure to the English language, and more rural backgrounds than the first. The third wave included populations specified in the Amerasian Homecoming Act and family members of those who had come before.

Haines (1989) has cautioned against the use of the term "Southeast Asian refugee," as it is not specific enough. There is much diversity among this group in terms of cultural, social, and linguistic background. The five major ethnic groups within this designation are: Vietnamese, Khmer, Hmong, Lao, and Chinese. Mien, another ethnic group, is much smaller in number. The word "Chinese" is complex as used in much of the literature. It may refer to ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos as well as Chinese immigrants

from Taiwan, Hong Kong, People's Republic of China, and other parts of the world. In some instances, it also refers to U.S.-born Chinese. Some studies reviewed later in this report describe their sample by ethnicity, some by country of origin, and some by home language. In some instances, these are all mixed together. A more appropriate term has been suggested for referring to ethnic Chinese from Vietnam: Sino-Vietnamese.

## Languages

The languages spoken in Asia can be categorized into five major groups: Altaic, Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan, Indo-European, and Malayo-Polynesian (W.S.-Y. Wong, 1983; Cheng, 1991). Asian Americans speak many different languages within these five different groups. Not only is there no language unifying all Asians, but in some cases there are many languages and dialects within a given country, particularly in China, India, and the Philippines.

The Chinese language is a member of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Its oral form is tonal and covers many dialects. Chinese Americans who are immigrants speak mostly Mandarin (also known as putonghua), Toisanese, and Cantonese. While these dialects are not totally understandable to other Chinese, there is only one Chinese writing system, which uses ideographs or characters. Japanese and Korean are members of the same Altaic family of languages, while Vietnamese belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic family of languages. Due to historical factors, words of Chinese origin can be found in Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese, but each of these three languages has developed its own alphabet systems.

Filipino, based on Tagalog, is a member of the Malayo-Polynesian family. Filipino and English are the official languages in the Philippines. The two major languages spoken by Asian Indians in the United States are Hindi and Gujarati, members of the Indo-European family of languages, but most Indians are proficient in English as well.

The Lao language is a member of the Sino-Tibetan language group, as is Khmer, which is spoken by the Cambodians. The Hmong people had a long oral history but no written language until recently. In contrast to English, the Southeast Asian languages (Vietnamese, Lao, Khmer, Hmong, and Mien) share five features: a preference for monosyllabic words; lexical use of tone; lack of inflections (tense, gender, etc.); use of noun classifiers; and serial verb construction (Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, & Yang, 1988, p. 51). Vietnamese students have an initial advantage over Cambodian, Laotian, and Chinese students in writing English because the Vietnamese use the Roman alphabet (Chuong, 1994).

## Religion and Culture

As is the case of languages, there is no one religion that unifies all countries in Asia. The major formal religions of Asian Americans are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, and Animism (Balgopal, 1995). Buddhism has a strong influence among Southeast Asians and Japanese Americans, as does Christianity among Filipinos, Hinduism and Sikhism among Asian Indians, Islam among Pakistanis, and Animism among the Hmong. In addition, Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and Japanese Americans in recent years have established ethnic Christian churches in the United States. This is especially true of Korean Americans. Although Confucianism exerts a strong influence on Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and Vietnamese Americans, it is more a system of social ethics than a religion.

As Min (1995) points out in his overview on Asian Americans, several cultural values are common threads that tie all Asian American groups together: emphasis on educational achievement; shame as a behavioral influence; respect for authority; high regard for the elderly; the centrality of family relationships and responsibilities; self-control and restraint in emotional expression; group orientation; middle position virtue; and filial piety. At the same time, there are ethnic group variations on the major cultural themes. While there is a general belief that the patriarchal family structure is an important feature of Asian cultures, it should be pointed out that patriarchy is by no means the only family structure among Asian American subgroups. The Lao family is matrifocal (Bournkeo, Inthavong, Luangpraseut, & Soukbandith, 1989). The term "filiarchal" has been applied to the Cambodian family (Ouk, Huffman, & Lewis, 1988; Um, 1996) to indicate the relatively loose structure and low resistance on the part of Cambodian parents to share authority with their children.

## Socioeconomic and Educational Indicators: How Asian Americans Fare

According to the 1990 census, the median Asian American family income in 1990 — $41,251 — is higher than that of whites, Blacks, and Latinos. Compared to whites, however, Asian Americans also have a higher percentage (though still much lower when compared to Blacks and Latinos) of families living at or below poverty level. On the indicator of single-parent households, Asian Americans fall below the national norm. Asian Americans have the highest proportion (82.4%) of children under 18 living in two-parent households.

Children and young adults (0 to 24) comprise 34 to 38 percent of the total Asian/ Pacific American population (Ong & Lee, 1993, p. 18). The school-age population, which

doubled between 1980 and 1990, is expected to double again between 1990 and 2020 (Paul Ong quoted in Kiang & Lee, 1993, p. 27). It is projected that by 2020 there will be a 10 percent increase in the number of Asian/Pacific immigrant children below the age of 15 in the U.S. (Kiang & Lee, 1993, p. 27). On a number of commonly accepted indicators of educational achievement, such as dropout rates, college enrollment, and graduation rates, Asian Americans as a group have fared quite well, even outperforming European Americans in some areas. According to Waggoner (1991), Asian Americans were 1.3 times less likely than white youths to be undereducated. The difference was even more stark when compared to non-Asian students of color. Asian American students had a higher percentage in 1992 than all other racial groups enrolled in college preparatory or academic programs (51% vs. 43%) and a lower percentage enrolled in vocational programs (8.8% vs. 11.7%) (National Center for Educational Statistics, October, 1994, p. 132, Table 134).

The American Council on Education's *12th Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education* states that the number of Asian Americans in the nation's colleges has increased almost 100% between the years 1982 and 1992, with a 9.4% gain in the one-year period 1991-92. Sixty-three percent of Asian Americans received their baccalaureate degrees within six years of starting college. This is the highest college retention rate among all ethnic groups (Feldman, 1994). According to 1990 census data published in *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993a), the percentage of Asian and Pacific Americans (77.5%) with at least a high school diploma was almost the same as for whites (77.9%) and much higher than all other racial groups. Of all racial groups, Asian American and Pacific Americans had the highest percentage (36.6%) of people with at least a college degree. There is one less positive note in this generally overall positive picture in that Asian/Pacific adults (defined as those 16 and over) have lower literacy skills than the national norms in all three areas: prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy (National Center for Educational Statistics, February, 1992).

There is some truth to the assertion that Asian elementary and secondary students do better than students of other ethnic/racial groups. In the 1980 national survey "High School and Beyond" (M.G. Wong, 1990), Asian students as a whole seemed to take their studies more seriously than white students, spending more time on homework, cutting classes less often, and aspiring toward college more often. This was particularly true of Chinese students. In California, for example, 1992 statistics (Guthrie, 1993) showed that Asian eighth-graders did better in math than did any other group, and have higher overall scores than their African American, Latino, and Native American classmates, scoring lower only than whites.

However, aggregate data does not tell the whole story. The diversity in country of origin, language, socioeconomic status, educational background, and degree of acculturation makes it virtually impossible to make generalizations about contemporary Asian Americans.

Although school failures constitute the focus of this literature review, it is instructive to examine factors that could influence school success. What follows is a summary of the vast body of research on why Asian American students seem to do better in school than do other racial/cultural groups.

## Theories on Asian American Achievement

Historically, Asian Americans have been the target of prejudice, harassment, and even violence. Anti-Asian sentiments in the American public led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Despite more than a century of severe discrimination in immigration, employment, housing, education, citizenship, marriage, and social life, immigrants from Asia have, as a group, taken advantage of the educational and career opportunities that opened up after World War II. With changes in immigration laws in 1965 favoring the professionally trained, the educational profile of Asian Americans has been transformed. Many of the children of these better-educated immigrants have done well in school. The earlier public perception of Asian American students as "uneducable heathens" was replaced by that of "whiz kids."

In recent years, Asian American school achievement has captured the attention of both the public and educators, but it remains a phenomenon "in search of an explanation" (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). A large number of works have been written on the subject; some of these examine variables that predict academic achievement among different racial/cultural groups while others advance new theories or challenge or revise existing theories (Barringer, Takeuchi, & Xenos, 1990; Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992; Chun, 1995; Erickson, 1987; Gibson, 1988; Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Huang and the National Center on Education in the Inner Cities, 1995; Keith & Benson, 1992; Kennedy & Park, 1994; Kim & Chun, 1992; Lee & Rong, 1988; Liu, 1991; Lynn, 1991; Ogbu, 1983, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992; Park, 1990; Peng & Wright, 1994; Pieke, 1991; Reglin & Adams, 1990; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Siu, 1992; Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi & Johnson, 1990; Stone, 1992; Sue & Okazaki, 1990, 1991; Sue & Padilla, 1986; Suzuki, 1977; Trueba, 1988; Wong, 1990).

It is beyond the scope of this review to detail the various explanations. By and large, they can be grouped according to these beliefs (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992):

(1) that there are inherited differences between groups in terms of intellectual abilities, (2) that certain ethnic groups socialize their children to have attitudes and behaviors that are oriented toward achievement, for example, willingness to put long hours into homework, and taking their studies seriously, (3) that certain ethnic groups value education highly and emphasize school success, and (4) that ethnic groups differ in their perception of or actual experience with educational and occupational discrimination. If one discounts genetic differences in intelligence, then there are essentially the family/cultural values explanation, the sociohistorical explanation, and a combination of the two.

To these explanations, Steinberg, Dornbusch, and Brown have added their own. From their study (1992), conducted from 1987 to 1988 of 15,000 students in nine schools in California, they concluded that "the effect of parenting practices on students' academic performance and behavior is moderated to a large extent by the social milieu they encounter among their peers at school" (p. 729). They found that while Asian American parents in the sample are less involved in their children's education than any other group of parents, these students report the highest level of peer support for academic achievement. The researchers noted with interest the pervasive phenomenon of informal Asian American study groups, something rarely found among other students.

All these theories and hypotheses are sure to provide fodder for debate for many years to come. Regardless of which theories they espouse or support, educational researchers have agreed that the model minority stereotype is misleading. The disparities in educational achievement among Asian Americans can no longer be disputed.

## Diversity among Asian Americans

Because bipolar distributions characterize almost every statistic on Asian Americans, one must be particularly careful in interpreting mean income, years of schooling, percentage of professionals, poverty rates, and so forth. For example, although 58.4% of Indians and Pakistanis in the United States are college graduates, only 2.9% of Hmongs in the United States are college graduates. Whereas only 5.6% of Japanese Americans have only an elementary education or less, as high as 61% of the Hmong Americans fall into that category. Whereas the median income for Asian Indian Americans, Filipino Americans, and Japanese Americans is over $40,000, that of Hmong Americans is less than $15,000 and that of Cambodians is less than $19,000. These vast ethnic group differences are masked by the means given for the Asian American category (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992; Ng, 1995). Another example is language proficiency. The mean percentage of Asian Americans

not speaking English well is 15%, but the span is wide, ranging from 69% for Laotians to only 5% for Asian Indians. The percentage of female-headed households is 4% for Asian Indians and 25% for Cambodian Americans (Ng, 1995).

Not only are there differences between ethnic groups, but differences within a given group can be substantial as well. Even if we confine our discussion to Chinese American immigrants, we still find a wide gap between the so-called "uptown Chinese" and "downtown Chinese" (Kwong, 1987). A well-educated, English-speaking, affluent professional from Hong Kong has little in common with a poorly-educated, non-English speaking, financially strapped laborer from the countryside in China; yet both might be recent immigrants who came on the basis of family reunification — the cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy.

To sum up, Filipino Americans, Japanese Americans, and Asian Indian Americans are characterized by higher educational and occupational levels than the other Asian American ethnic groups. Classifying over 25 ethnic groups into one designation called "Asian Americans" has led many to overlook important differences. This has had unfortunate consequences for educational and social services. We now turn our attention to the diversity among Asian American elementary and secondary school students.

# III. Asian American Students in the Public Schools

A caveat should precede any discussion of educational data on Asian American students in the public schools. "Existing data sources do not provide an adequate basis for reaching firm conclusions about the educational achievement of Asian American immigrant students. They suffer from critical design flaws (the exclusion of many LEP students from their samples) and small sample sizes..." (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992, p. 75). As a result, there is definitely an undercount of LEP students.

## Enrollment Figures

In Fall, 1992, 3.5% of all enrolled public elementary and public school students were Asians or Pacific Islanders (National Center for Education Statistics, May, 1994). According to a national study of over a thousand Asian Pacific eighth-graders (National Center for Educational Statistics, February, 1992), roughly 52% of the Asian sample were U.S.-born and 48% were foreign-born. Nearly three out of four students came from bilingual homes, but only 12% were highly proficient in their home language. High socioeconomic status and high English proficiency were found to be correlated with above-average reading and math performance as well as confidence about graduating from high school.

In terms of state breakdowns, in 1989, the three states with the highest percentages of Asian/Pacific Islander students in public schools were Hawaii, California, and Washington (Mattson, 1993, p. 4.19, Table 8). In 1992, these were still the top states: in Hawaii, 68% of students were Asian/Pacific Islanders, in California, 11% were Asian/Pacific Islanders, and in Washington, 6% were Asian/Pacific Islanders (National Center on Educational Statistics, October, 1994, p. 60, Table 45). As many as 22% of all students in California schools during the 1993-94 school year were LEP, collectively speaking 38 different languages, half of which were Asian languages (Kirst et al., 1995).

## Subgroup Differences in School Performance

A consistent pattern of differential educational achievement among Asian Americans emerges after examining national and state data. While there are slight variations from study to study, the general rank order in performance is as follows: Asian Indian and Japanese students tend to do the best, followed by Chinese and Koreans, then Filipinos, and then

Southeast Asians. Within the Southeast Asian groups, Vietnamese students perform the best. A sample of studies demonstrating some of the differences will be examined next.

Analyzing the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Survey data on eighth-graders in the nation, Peng and Lee (1991) show that Asian American children, regardless of ethnicity, scored higher in math than in reading. Chinese, Japanese, Korean and South Indian children's composite scores (reading and math) were above the national average, and those of Southeast Asian and Filipino children were average. Composite scores of Pacific Islander children, however, were well below average. An analysis of school achievement data on over a thousand Asian American students in grades four through 11 in the Seattle public school system (Mizokawa, 1992) shows not only differences in levels of overall achievement among Korean American, Filipino American, Chinese American, and Japanese American students, but also in the subgroups' patterns of achievement in math and language, reflecting the subgroups' strengths and weaknesses.

Two recent studies (Mizokawa, 1992; Yee, Resnick, Bith & Kawazoe, 1995) are attempts to disaggregate the data to compare the school performance of various Asian ethnic groups in California schools. Mizokawa found that, for example, Hmong students' educational needs were masked by the lumping of data. The study by Yee and associates (1995) in a large California middle school found that Chinese students scored the highest on the CTBS (California Test of Basic Skills) in both math and reading and language; that Vietnamese students scored higher than Miens and Cambodians in math but not in reading and language; that Chinese and Vietnamese had the highest GPA of the group (a B average); and that Mien students had a higher GPA (B-) than Cambodian students (C). Given the cultural background of the Mien (rural with no formal education), their group's high GPA was unexpected. The researchers, however, raised questions about what GPA really measures in terms of actual student learning. The study also identified about 15% of the Cambodian student body whose GPA (1.0 or less) indicated current or future school failure. The researchers noted that lumping data on all Asian subgroups had two results: it diminished the high achievement of many of the Chinese and Vietnamese students while hiding a sizable percentage of at-risk Cambodian students.

## Subgroup Differences in Dropout and At-Risk Rates

The three major sources of national data—the Census Bureau, the National Center for Educational Statistics, and the High School and Beyond survey—all use different definitions for "dropout." Depending on the definition used, the reported national dropout rate has ranged

from 11 to 28 percent. Unfortunately, statistical breakdowns by race in tables on dropouts prepared by the U.S. Department of Education (e.g., Snyder, 1993; National Center on Educational Statistics, October, 1994) do not include "Asian Americans." This gap in data is somewhat filled by reviewing statistics from states and school districts with a large concentration of Asian American students. Several kinds of statistics are usually available: the proportion of Asian Americans among the total number of dropouts, the proportion of Asian American dropouts within the total student population, the rate of dropout for Asian Americans, and the rate of dropout for each Asian American ethnic group.

In California, in the 1980s, among Asian American students, the highest dropout rate (48%) was found among Southeast Asians (Olsen, 1988). Filipino students also had a high dropout rate (46.1%). According to Rumbaut and Ima (1988), Pacific Islanders had the highest dropout rate (17%) in San Diego followed by Latinos (14%), Cambodians (14%), Vietnamese (11%), and white (10%). Other Asians in San Diego, including the Hmong, had a low rate of 5%. Encouraging news recently came from California (Kirst et al., 1995) where the dropout rate of Asian Americans has been declining steadily, from about 15% in 1986 to 12% in 1990, to 10% in 1992. In the school year 1993-94, Asian Americans constituted almost 12% of the total enrollment but only 6% of the state's 70,000 dropouts. The dropout rate for Asian Americans was 2.9% in 1991-92, 2.7% in 1992-93, and 2.6% in 1993-94, all lower than the state average dropout rates of 5.0%, 5%, and 4.9%, respectively (California State Department of Education, 1995).

In San Francisco Unified School District, Asian Americans constituted 48% of the total enrollment and 27% of all dropouts in the school year 1994-95. (Almost 30% of the dropouts in the district were African Americans and 25% were Latinos.) The dropout rates for the different Asian American ethnic groups were: 0.3% for Japanese, 0.5% for Koreans, 6.8% for Filipinos, 9.1% for Chinese, and 10.3% for other Asian Americans, mostly Southeast Asians (San Francisco Unified School District, 1995).

In the Seattle public schools (Seattle Public Schools, 1987 cited in Pang, 1995), the overall dropout rate for Asian/Pacific Americans is 11%. Southeast Asians, other than Vietnamese, had the highest dropout rate (17.9%), followed by East Indians, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese, who had the lowest dropout rate (5.1%). Except for the "Southeast Asian, other" category, all Asian American groups had a lower dropout rate than whites.

In Texas, the high school dropout rate for Asians was 20.2% (Frazer, 1990). In New York City, it was 16.4% in 1991, an increase of 9% between 1989 and 1991 (figures cited in

Sim, 1992, p. 4). Statistics in Massachusetts revealed that although the dropout rate for Asians was only 4.7%, in Lowell, Massachusetts during the 1986-87 school year, over half of the Laotian students in that city who started the school year dropped out (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1990; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992).

Dropout is a more specific phenomenon than being at risk of school failure. One indicator of being at risk is failing the reading and math tests that all eighth-graders take. An analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Survey's 1988 data reveals that 23% of Asian American students failed to achieve the basic level in math while 24% failed to achieve the basic level in reading (Bradby & Owings, 1992). Almost 40% of Asian Pacific American high school students in 1986-87 met the Seattle Public Schools' definition of "at risk" by scoring below the 50th percentile on the California Achievement Test. Eighteen percent of whites and 41% of Chicanos met this definition of "at risk." Within the Asian American group, Japanese, East Indian, Korean, and Chinese students generally did better than the Filipino, Vietnamese, and other Southeast Asian students (Seattle Public Schools, cited by Pang, 1995).

# IV. Factors That Place Asian American Students At Risk

Who are the Asian American students who are at risk of school failure? To answer this question, Waggoner (1991) analyzed the 1980 U.S. Census data and other state statistics to develop a profile of Asian American undereducated youth. In her findings, 9% of the Asian American young population were undereducated, one-third of whom lived in California. Texas, however, had the highest undereducation rate. Foreign-born youths were twice as likely as the U.S.-born students to fall into this at-risk group, and females were slightly more likely than males to do so. Foreign-born youths, those from a non-English language background, those who lived at or below poverty level, urban youths, and those who entered the country in their late teens were also over-represented in the undereducated group. Income and immigrant status were the best predictors: foreign-born Asian Americans from poor families were 1.6 times more likely to be undereducated than those from more advantaged families.

Much of what Waggoner found still holds true today; yet Waggoner's profile lacked the observation that Southeast Asian youths were more likely than other Asian youths to be undereducated. Between 1980 and the present time, the Southeast Asian population has exploded; so has the number of research studies on this population.

## Research on Southeast Asian Students

Numerous studies have been conducted on the needs, perceptions, and adaptation of Southeast Asian children, youth, and their families. Some focus on the Vietnamese (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Chuong, 1988; Davis & McDaid, 1992; Dufresne, 1992; Luce, 1990; Prickett, 1983) while others focus on the Hmong (Y. Dao, 1992; Goldstein, 1988; Pfaff, 1995; Sonsalla, 1984; Strouse, 1986; Timm, 1994; Vang, 1993; Walker-Moffat, 1992), on Laotians (D.M.C. Lee, 1993), and on the Khmer (Sack, 1986; Smith-Hefner, 1990; South Cove Community Health Center, 1985). A number of studies included several ethnic groups under the rubric of Southeast Asians (e.g., Ascher, 1984, 1989; Baizerman & Hendrick, 1988; Blakely, 1984; Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; L.N. Huang, 1989; Ima & Rumbaut, 1989; Lese & Robbins, 1994; Lewis & Le, 1995; Mitrsomwang, 1992; Ranard, 1989; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988, 1995; Rumbaut, 1990; Smith-Hefner, 1990; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990; Vang, 1993; Whitmore, Trautmann, & Caplan, 1989). The three major surveys of the adjustment of Southeast Asian youths commissioned by the Office of Refugee Resettlement were conducted in Philadelphia (Peters, 1988), Minneapolis-St. Paul (Baizerman & Hendrick, 1988), and San Diego (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). In addition, the ethnographic study of Hmong elementary

school children in La Playa, California (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990) is considered important.

This sheer number and variety of studies conducted is unprecedented for any minority group in this country, with designs ranging from large-scale telephone surveys of random samples drawn from a national base to small ethnographic studies using observation and in-depth interviews. In addition to cross-sectional designs, panel designs have been used to obtain cumulative data on changes over time (Gordon, 1989).

The studies to date have shown most Southeast Asian refugee children to be resilient and free of severe, long-term problems. Their adjustment is amazing, considering the fact that many have experienced significant loss and have witnessed violence. They have acculturated to the new country, almost always ahead of their parents. At the same time, consistent findings from various studies show a prevalence of learning problems among Southeast Asian refugees compared to other Asian American students, and indicate that Laotian students are least likely among Asian Americans to complete high school.

## How We Should Conceptualize Educational Risk

What factors make some Asian American students more likely than others to fail in school or not complete high school? Trueba, Cheng, and Ima (1993, p. 123) have come up with twelve characteristics associated with educational risk. Most of these characteristics are applicable to Southeast Asian immigrant or refugee students who arrived in this country during puberty. They are as follows:

- disrupted schooling
- disrupted family support
- experience of trauma
- long duration at refugee camps
- poor health
- lack of prior schooling
- poor school attendance
- lack of participation in class
- lack of supervision at home (possibly no parents)
- lack of progress in English
- lack of participation in extracurricular activities
- lack of guidance and counseling for career/life goals

One would note that most of the above factors are characteristics of the student or the family. This is not unusual as most lists of risk factors (e.g., Merchant, 1987; Reyes, 1989)

also focus on linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic characteristics. This focus is the target of criticism by Garcia, Wilkinson, and Ortiz (1995) because of its assumption that the school system is flawless and that students and families must bear the responsibility for the students' academic difficulty. A more meaningful and accurate way of conceptualizing educational risk is the ecological framework proposed by Johnson (1994) and modified by Garcia, Wilkinson, and Ortiz (1995).

It is around the ecological framework that we will organize research findings on factors that distinguish Asian American students at risk from those who are not at risk. Risk factors may arise from the individual context, family context, the classroom/school context, and the community/societal context. Common to all contexts are factors such as cultural and linguistic characteristics, expectations and perceptions, shared responsibility and collaboration, and availability of support systems.

## Risk Factors in the Individual Student Context

Risk for school failure is seldom due to one factor, but a combination of factors. As Sim (1992) points out, "Facing a tough time in school, undergoing tremendous emotional stress, and confronting learning difficulties, some students eventually drift away from school. According to most teachers and counselors, [immigrant] students in their first year face the highest risk of dropping out" (p. 44).

Certain factors pertain to traits and experiences that are unique and inherent to the student, and thus are beyond the control of the teacher (Garcia, Wilkinson, & Ortiz, 1995, p. 448). Those that will be considered here are the student's language backgrounds and abilities, history of schooling, timing and reasons for coming to the United States, emotional trauma and vulnerability, ethnic group affiliation and identity, motivation, and sense of self-efficacy. Although these are distinct traits and experiences, there is unavoidably some overlap between these factors. Although there is also overlap between the individual context and the family context, these two categories are separated for convenience of discussion. For instance, the family's socioeconomic status has ramifications for the student's sense of self-efficacy and motivation.

### *English Proficiency and Literacy in Home Language*

A study in California found that most LEP students scored below the norm in all subject areas and, among Asian groups, Southeast Asian children appeared to be most at risk.

Schools that reported a large concentration of Southeast Asians had a high attrition rate of 48% (Olsen, 1988).

That LEP students tend to do worse in school than FEP students is a well-documented observation (e.g., U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992). On the other hand, prior exposure to English or having parents who understand and speak English is a definite advantage for U.S.-born Asian students, Filipino, and Asian Indian immigrant students. It typically takes immigrant children two years to learn functional English and as many as seven years to be literate enough in English to adequately catch up in academic performance (S.C. Wong, 1988; Wong & Lopez, 1994). Given the very different orthography and literary traditions between English and Asian languages, it is even more difficult for Asian children to learn English. Far from being strictly a cognitive task, learning a second language evokes what Nikeykawa (1983) calls "sociocultural" effects as well, including emotional conflicts.

On the other hand, just living in a non-English speaking home does not necessarily place a student at risk of school failure (S.C. Wong, 1988; Stone, 1992). There are other influences that retard or enhance mastery of English. S.C. Wong (1988) cautions against the tendency to generalize about the immigrant children's English proficiency "based on place of origin and length of U.S. residence alone, without taking into account their socioeconomic background and the type of school they attended" (p. 207). A recent case study of 387 Vietnamese high school students found that literacy in Vietnamese actually contributed to identification with the ethnic group and to academic achievement (Bankston & Zhou, 1995). There is evidence to suggest that being illiterate or semi-literate in one's home language is a significant factor in educational risk (Cummins, 1981; Hancock, DeLorenzo, & Ben-Barka, 1983; V.W. Lee, 1993; Ouk, Huffman, & Lewis, 1988; Walsh, 1991) because students who fall into this category lack the requisite visual, auditory, and sensory-motor skills, as well as oral language and conceptual development, needed to progress educationally in English (Cummins, 1981; S.C. Wong, 1987). Thus, Southeast Asian students whose earlier schooling has been disrupted by war, and those who have not used print in their native language because they come from a rural background in their home countries, such as the Hmong and Mien, may encounter more problems in school than others.

***History of Schooling***

Related to the literacy in either home language or English is the students' prior schooling. For many, there was none, or it has been unstable. Many children born or raised in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia during the Vietnam War did not complete their schooling. Some of the Vietnamese students went through several major educational changes before

arriving as refugees because the new Communist government changed a French-based education system to a socialist curriculum, followed by an informal and inconsistent education in the refugee camps for up to three years (Chuong, 1994). Even after the Vietnam War was over, Southeast Asian children continued to wait in Thai refugee camps for their turn to come to the United States. In the refugee camps, education was not necessarily taught in the student's home language and the teachers were, for the most part, untrained volunteers (Bournkeo, Inthavaong, Luangpraseut, & Soukbandith, 1989; Chuong, 1994). In contrast, Asian American students who immigrated from Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, or Hong Kong typically have had more stable schooling because of the absence of war and the enforcement of compulsory free education. Sim (1992) points out that there are three types of Chinese immigrant students: the type who easily fits into the image of the "model minority," the type who encounters problems in their school adjustment, and the type who do not adjust at all. In general, those Chinese students from rural China and Southeast Asia are less prepared academically at the time of arrival in the United States than are their counterparts from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and urban China.

***Timing and Patterns of Coming to the United States***

The difference between a refugee and an immigrant is very salient. In the case of the refugee, the "push" factor is much stronger than the "pull" factor. Due to the sudden change in political events, there is typically no time for a refugee to make material preparations, let alone achieve psychological readiness. Southeast Asian students are mostly children of refugees. Whether born in their homeland or in refugee camps in Thailand, Southeast Asian children left their place of residence with few familiar possessions in hand and had no idea how soon they would be coming to the United States. While at camp, they lived in an environment of poor sanitation, overcrowding, authoritarianism, and dependency on the United Nations High Commission on Refugee Resettlement.

The first wave of Southeast Asian refugees consisted mainly of high-ranking officials, diplomats, U.S. government employees, and professionals from South Vietnam. Subsequent waves of refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos tended to be less educated, and less connected, and to have witnessed more violence, suffered more loss, and spent more time in refugee camps. It is clear from the literature that the later arrivals have stronger odds against them than the first wave of Southeast Asian refugees. For example, a University of Michigan study of the academic achievement of 529 Southeast Asian refugee children in Boston, Chicago, Houston, Seattle, and Orange County, California (Whitmore, Trautmann, & Caplan, 1989) showed that 29% of the children had an overall GPA in the A range, 52% in the B

range, 17% in the C range, and only 4% in the D range or lower. Their achievement was confirmed by scores on the California Achievement Test. Only 25% scored below the fortieth percentile. That the children were able to do so well, regardless of the quality or geographic location of the public schools they were attending, was astonishing. However, the particular demographics of this sample should be kept in mind when interpreting these positive findings. It was a sample of the first wave of Southeast Asian refugees, who arrived in the United States between 1978 and 1982 and who had more educational and socioeconomic advantages than refugees of subsequent waves.

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) survey (Baratz-Snowden & Duran, 1987) found that 11th grade Asian American language minority students read less well than their non-language-minority counterparts; the differences in earlier grades (4th and 8th), however, were insignificant. Studies consistently find that the younger students are at the time of arrival, the less likely they are to drop out of school later. Younger children pick up English more readily than older ones. Regardless of immigrant or refugee status, students who come as adolescents are more likely to experience problems in schools (Ima & Rumbaut, 1989). Language learning is not the only obstacle: an inability to fit in socially can lead to a sense of disconnectedness from the school.

***Emotional Trauma and Vulnerability***

It has been extensively documented that Southeast Asian students are more likely to be at risk of school failure or of dropping out than students of other Asian American ethnic groups. This has to do, at least in part, with the hardships and trauma these students and/or their parents suffered in battlefields, refugee detention camps, and boat rides to freedom as a result of the political turmoil in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (Chuong, 1994; M. Dao, 1991; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Within this group, Cambodian students are considered the most traumatized. What distinguishes earlier Cambodian students from other Southeast Asian students is the suffering they endured under the terror of the Pol Pot regime (1975-1978), which left them with many losses of kin, emotional scars, and psychosomatic symptoms, such as depression, post-traumatic disorder, concentration camp syndrome, and survivor guilt syndrome. These problems make it difficult for them to benefit from instruction in school (Coburn, 1992; M. Dao, 1991; Sack et al., 1986; Kinzie, Sack, Angell, & Clarke, 1989; Uba, 1994).

Two groups of Southeast Asian American students are considered to be particularly vulnerable, making them more susceptible to school failure and juvenile delinquency. These groups are unaccompanied minors and Amerasians, some of whom were placed in white foster

homes (Baker, 1982; Bromley, 1988; Chuong, 1994; L.N. Huang, 1989; Mortland & Egan, 1987; Nidorf, 1985; Ranard & Gilzow, 1989; Redick & Wood, 1982; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Unaccompanied minors are mostly children and youth from Southeast Asia who were either sent alone to the United States by their parents or became separated from their families before or during the escape. Many of them spent a long time in refugee camps, and as a result, can present a myriad of psychosocial problems: for example, hyperactivity, depression, restlessness, survivor guilt, and grief. In their foster homes, the behavior of some of the youths is unpredictable, alternating between periods of cooperativeness and periods of aggressiveness. There is some indication that they run a higher risk of suicide (Nidorf, 1985).

Another group of unaccompanied minors comes mainly from Hong Kong and Taiwan (S.C. Wong & M. Lopez, 1994). For a host of financial and political reasons, and in search of better educational opportunities for their children, middle and upper-middle class Chinese parents in Taiwan and Hong Kong often send their children to live with relatives or paid caregivers in the United States. Little research has been conducted on this group of so-called "little foreign students." While it is difficult to adapt to a new culture and master a new language for all Asian immigrant and refugee students, not having the support of one's birth family or extended family adds to the obstacles.

The second group of particularly vulnerable Asian American students are the half-Vietnamese, half-Caucasian or half-Black children fathered by American GIs during the Vietnam War. Treated as social outcasts in Vietnam, many Amerasians became homeless children. The Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1987 allowed them to come to this country, where they have encountered racism, discrimination, and non-acceptance by whites, Blacks, and Asians (Ranard & Gilzow, 1989).

***Ethnic Group Identity and Motivation***

The ethnic group one is born into is not necessarily the same as the reference group, i.e., the group that one aspires to or by whose standards one measures oneself. S.J. Lee (1994) conducted an ethnographic study of both high- and low-achieving Asian American students in a high school in Philadelphia. A small number of the Asian American students were U.S.-born, the rest came from Cambodia, Laos, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and China. Rather than classifying the students by country of birth, the researcher examined how they naturally identify themselves, regardless of their ethnicity or national origins. The four identity groups were: Koreans, Asians, Asian new wavers, and Asian Americans. While those students who identified themselves as Koreans and Asians were hard-working, family-oriented, and believed school to be the key to success in the United States, they were not all high achievers.

One interesting but disturbing observation was the reluctance of some "Asian" students to seek academic support due to shame and the desire to live up to the model minority stereotype — a reluctance that only compounds academic problems. Those who identified themselves as Asian new wavers — mostly Southeast Asian refugees from working-class and poor families — were peer-oriented and "almost flamboyant in their disrespect for academic achievement" (S.J. Lee, 1994, p. 422). Distrustful of adult authority figures such as police and teachers, these students were eager to be accepted by non-Asians, even if it meant cutting classes and doing a minimum of school work. Finally, those students who defined themselves as Asian Americans expressed a pan-ethnic identity and, unlike the "Koreans" and "Asians," spoke out against the model minority stereotype. It was their desire to fight racism that motivated them to work hard and get good grades.

The significance of this study lies in its identification of differences in perceptions among Asian American students of future opportunities and attitudes toward schooling. S.J. Lee (1994) has shown that identity, far from being static, is negotiated through experiences and relationships inside and outside of school. Identity does not derive merely from being born into a voluntary or involuntary minority group, as posited in Ogbu's work (1983). Within the Asian American group, students reflect different attitudes, perceptions, and motivations.

***Relevance of Education and Motivation***

Unmotivated children are seldom successful students. Research has shed light on why some Asian American students are not motivated to stay in school. Among Southeast Asian students in Oregon, Blakely (1984) found tremendous pressures felt by the Vietnamese students to succeed — pressures from the schools, their families, and themselves. Some students grew tired and simply dropped out of school. Others, particularly Laotian students, decided early to withdraw from academic competition, and chose instead to focus on other aspects of their lives. While some school personnel found it hard to accept that not all Asian American students are concerned about school success, the reasoning of refugee students who have seen atrocities in their homeland did seem valid. As one school counselor reported, these students "say it does not matter. Here they have freedom. Nobody tries to kill them. Nobody comes in the night to their house with a gun. How can it matter if they stop coming to school?" (Blakely, 1984, p. 218).

In some cases, motivation is a function of the amount of challenge in academic courses. We will examine this further under the topic "Classroom/School Context."

### *Sense of Self-Efficacy*

A significant relationship between self-adequacy and truancy was found in a study of 108 Laotian students in three high schools in California (D.M.C. Lee, 1993). The sample included both LEP and FEP students. According to the study, students who were LEP were more likely to feel inadequate and be truant. On the basis of these findings, the author recommended a curriculum that includes self-adequacy enhancement and intensive communication-based ESL classes.

## Educational Risk in the Family Context

### *Family's Socioeconomic Status*

The literature on educational risk is replete with references to family socioeconomic class being one of the best predictors of school failure and dropping out (see reviews of the literature by Frank, 1990; Merchant, 1987; Waggoner, 1991). Yet, although many studies show a correlation between the socioeconomic status of a student's family and the student's likelihood of dropping out, Frank concludes that such correlations are misleading. In her secondary analysis of statewide survey data in Texas (1990), she shows that it is the number of family stressors, rather than the level of family income per se, that accounts for dropout. Parents with economic survival needs have related stresses that make it hard for them to provide the supervision and support a student needs to succeed in school.

In terms of common socioeconomic indicators such as median income, or people living in poverty or receiving public assistance, the Hmong and the Cambodians are the poorest groups, while the Asian Indians, Japanese, and Filipinos are the more advantaged ones. The rankings of school achievements for these ethnic groups largely correspond with these rankings of socioeconomic indicators. The situation with the Chinese and Filipinos, however, is more complicated. Filipino American parents tend to be highly educated and have been exposed to English. Only 5.2% of Filipino American families live at or below the poverty level. Yet, there are signs that many U.S.-born Filipino American students are not doing well, as indicated by lower college enrollment rates and higher non-graduation rates (Agbayani-Siewert & Revilla, 1995; Galang, 1988; Ng, 1995; Olsen, 1989). The Chinese have been called "the most polarized...in socioeconomic status" (Min, 1995, p. 27). The disparities in educational achievement among the Chinese is a reflection of the wide gaps between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Poverty has ramifications for older Chinese students, resulting in perpetual worries about money and the necessity of taking after-school jobs that interfere with studying (Sim, 1992).

The new wave of Chinese immigrants work long hours in extremely exploitive conditions in the ethnic enclave. Their offspring are often expected to contribute to the family's earnings by taking after-school jobs. One estimate shows that over 80% of Chinese immigrant students work 20 to 35 hours a week in low-paying jobs in Chinese sweatshops and restaurants. Exhaustion, an inability to concentrate on school work, the lack of study time, and a changed perception of the value of education are some of the negative consequences of the pressure to survive economically (Chin, 1992, cited in Sim, 1992).

***Parents' Educational Level***

Among Southeast Asian refugees, the variations in educational levels are remarkably wide (Tran, 1982; Strand & Jones, 1985), with the Vietnamese being more literate in their own language and in English than Laotians, Cambodians, and Hmongs. While 26% of the Vietnamese have had no formal education, the percentage of Hmongs with none is 81%. The low level of education of some Southeast Asian students' and Chinese students' parents makes it difficult for them to offer academic assistance or general guidance to their children (Rumbaut, 1990; Sim, 1992; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992).

Perhaps parental educational background, more than a lack of financial resources, influences parents' ability to offer guidance to their children, as indicated by a study of Southeast Asian refugee children's school achievement (Whitmore, Trautmann, & Caplan, 1989). These researchers found that parents from an urban background and with higher levels of education had a feeling of efficacy. They were able to read to their children and be supportive of their children's schooling despite a lack of the financial resources of middle-class families.

***Lack of Parental Supervision and Support***

Earlier we mentioned unaccompanied minors, Amerasians, and "little foreign students," who have in common the physical absence of their families. While many other students' parents are physically present, some are unavailable to support their children emotionally, for example, when they have to cope with their own emotional problems. Maternal level of depression has been found to correlate with the low achievement of some Southeast Asian refugee students (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Lack of supervision and support from parents has unfortunate consequences, not only in academic problems but in behavioral problems as well. According to Sim (1992), many recent immigrant students are left to their own devices, staying out late, roaming pool halls, video game parlors, and cinemas. A similar situation is reported in the Vietnamese community (Chuong, 1994).

In Sung's study (1987) of the adjustment experience of Chinese immigrant children and youth in New York City, the data she collected from students, parents, community leaders, school personnel, street workers, and even gang members revealed most students to be doing well and meeting the expectations of family, school, and society. Nevertheless, the pervasive absence of parents from the home due to preoccupation with making a living; the taking-over of family functions (including meals, homework assistance, and medical attention) by community agencies and schools; and the rising influence of negative peer groups were matters of grave concern.

Gang membership and school failure are often connected, although it is not always easy to determine which comes first. Sung (1996) concluded from her three-year study that the strongest correlate to gang problems is drug problems and the strongest correlate to drug problems is school problems. Beginning in the late 1980s, police and community leaders became concerned with the increase of Asian American youth gang activities in major American cities (Sung, 1987; Kifner, 1991; Kwok, 1991; Sim, 1992; Terris, 1987; Yokoi, 1993). Ng (1995) attributes this to the lack of adult supervision of some Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Chinese youths. Hmong adolescents tend not to be involved with gangs. As with youths from other racial groups, Asian American adolescents often join gangs to obtain a sense of belonging and support not available elsewhere. As mentioned earlier, unaccompanied Southeast Asian minors and Amerasians are more susceptible to negative peer influences.

The Asian Gang Intelligence Unit in the Fifth Precinct police station, located in New York City's Chinatown, estimated that 95% of the city's 200-300 gang members are dropouts (figure cited in Sim 1992, p. 4). The problem of lack of parental supervision in some Asian American communities prompted a community leader in New York City to make the following poignant remark:

> It's very ironic that, on the one hand, most Chinese parents immigrated to this country because they wanted to secure a better educational opportunity for their children. But, once they are here, they begin to ignore the educational needs of their kids. There is no doubt that they work very hard to make their American dreams come true. Unfortunately, in the process, the working parents have lost their children.
>
> (Billy Yim, cited in Sim, 1992, p. 46)

***Cultural Values***

The tremendous cultural gulf between most Asian students, their schools, and teachers has been said to cause problems in students' learning by creating internal conflict and

misunderstanding. In and of themselves, however, cultural differences between the immigrant student and his or her school or teachers do not place the student at risk of failure, as illustrated by a 1988 study of Punjabi Sikh students from India (Gibson, 1988). Despite strong parental opposition to cultural assimilation and the students' own adherence to home cultural and religious practices, the Sikh students in this study were high achievers in school because, as Gibson suggests, they were able to maintain strong community ties outside of and separate from school.

Another point of view states that the Asian values and traditions of hard work, of deferring gratification, of reverence for the teacher, and of respect for education are actually compatible with the white middle-class values embraced by most public schools. The explanatory power of this cultural thesis, however, has severe limitations. (See Siu, 1992a for a full discussion.) For example, it does not explain why children of more acculturated long-time Asian American immigrants or U.S.-born Asians tend to have greater educational achievement as a group than children of more recent immigrants, who presumably are less Americanized and adhere more closely to their traditional home cultures.

Some (e.g., Rumbaut & Ima, 1988) have suggested that Confucianism — which has a heavy influence among the Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese — is conducive to educational achievement because of a reverence for education and a strong belief in effort and human malleability (Hess, Chang, & McDevitt, 1987). This view has some empirical support: Mizokawa and Rychman (1990) found that compared to non-Asians, over 2500 Asian American students in their study were more likely to attribute success to effort rather than to luck, ability, or task ease. Korean students were most likely to attribute success to effort, followed by Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, and Southeast Asians. Given the influence of Confucianism in Vietnamese culture, the fact that the Vietnamese students displayed the lowest "effort" scores is surprising.

In contrast, Cambodia and Laos are more influenced by Theravada Buddhism, which has a more fatalistic view of outcomes. Smith-Hefner's 1990 study found that Khmer parents encouraged their children to do their best and viewed their children as having personal goals and capacities. The same parents, however, tended to see their children's failure as the result of forces native to the children's character and beyond the parents' control.

Some educators believe that these different views of human nature account for the differences in school performance among Asian American subgroups. The Confucianism vs. Buddhism argument has some validity, but is not completely satisfactory. Confucian influence is absent in India (where Hinduism and Islam are strong influences), but Asian Indians tend

to have a much lower percentage of at-risk students than other ethnic groups. In addition, one study found that Laotian refugees embraced essentially the same values as Vietnamese and Chinese refugees. Between 97% and 99% of the sample indicated that they valued educational achievement, a cooperative and harmonious family, and responsibility for carrying out obligations (Whitmore, Trautmann, & Caplan, 1989).

Recently, a number of scholars have raised questions about the proper role of traditional Asian cultural values in school achievement. Trueba, Cheng, and Ima (1993) have found evidence that some Asian American students do not accept the traditional values of obedience, moderation, humility, and harmony, viewing them as dysfunctional in a modern society. Given the upheavals that accompanied the war in Vietnam, Chuong (1994) calls for careful interpretation and selective use of outdated literature on Southeast Asian cultures and Vietnamese cultures.

Another often forgotten reality is that interactions occur between students from different cultures in one school. So-called Asian values are not static; they will change as they come in contact with other cultures, as indicated by the tendency of some Cambodian, Lao, and Mien students to emulate an African American demeanor, language, dress, and values (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988).

Thus, Pang (1995) cautions against placing too much emphasis on Confucian values in explaining the presence or absence of academic achievement. Since the concern is with Asian American students and not students in Asia, one must acknowledge the fact that as a minority group residing in a larger American society, Asian Americans are under tremendous pressure to work out some integration of old and new values.

***Parental Expectations and Family Priorities***

To almost all immigrants, Asians or not, education represents the only avenue that can offset their disadvantage in a new country, and the only hope for the second generation. Many expect their children to get good grades and to go on to college. At the very least, almost all parents want their children to graduate from high school. Some Asian American students, however, are not encouraged by their parents to study hard or finish school, due to competing family priorities. In a study of low-income Chinese immigrant families in New York City's Chinatown, for example, Sim (1992) found that some parents did not stress education. Pressed by financial needs, these parents urged older students, especially those who were not excelling in school, to quit school and get full-time jobs.

Other parental expectations stemming more from cultural traditions than from financial worries may also place students at risk. A case in point is the cultural pressure on Hmong youth to marry young and for girls to put family responsibilities ahead of study, a pressure that sometimes leads to early school-leaving (Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, & Yang, 1988; Goldstein, 1988; Trueba, Cheng, & Ima, 1993; Vang, 1993; Walker-Moffat, 1992). Mau's study (1990, 1995) reveals a similar pattern of different cultural expectations placed on Filipino American, Native Hawaiian, and Samoan American high school girls.

What several empirical studies of Hmong girls point to is that being academically proficient, motivated, and hardworking does not ensure completion of high school (Goldstein, 1988; Vang, 1993; Walker-Moffat, 1992). Walker-Moffat (1992) argues that the Hmong community's cultural priority is cultural survival, which means having as many babies as possible. "Because the gender role assigned to Hmong girls is not compatible with current educational practices in the United States, a high level of academic motivation is generally irrelevant" (p. 4). Even before dropping out, school attendance and assignment completion take a back seat to family responsibilities. One bright note in Vang's study (1993) is that those Hmong girls who were academically proficient had the desire and motivation to return to school to complete their education after marriage.

***Family Relationships and Child-Rearing Practices***

Traditionally, Asian parents have seen their role as one of controlling and monitoring. Obedience and discipline are typically expected of Asian children and there is pressure on them to achieve (Chen & Uttal, 1988; Ho, 1986; Morrow, 1989; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Siu, 1992a, 1992b; M.G. Wong, 1990). Of course, there are variations among the subgroups. For example, Rumbaut and Ima (1988) found Laotian and Khmer parents of secondary school students to manifest less of an aggressively competitive attitude toward academic success and to put less pressure on their children than did Sino-Vietnamese, Vietnamese, and Hmong parents. Furthermore, the Sino-Vietnamese, Vietnamese, and Hmong parents tended to exercise stronger control over their children, placing more emphasis on collective survival whereas Laotian and Khmer parents valued an individualistic view of life. Vietnamese parents exercised the strictest control over their children and instilled in them a strong sense of obligation to do well in school. The Hmongs, though from a rural background, succeeded in instilling a sense of discipline and respect for authority in their children. This could possibly account for the tenacity and high motivation to do well among Hmong students (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988).

Besides parenting practices, one should examine family relationships, particularly how children respond to their parents and how well they communicate together. The process of immigration often exacts a heavy toll on family relationships, resulting in problems such as role reversals (between parent and child roles, between husband and wife roles), differential rates of acculturation, and disappearance of a common language of communication. As immigrant students (especially young children) acquire English, they tend to lose their native language (Wong-Fillmore, cited by Kiang & Lee, 1993, p. 39). But language is by no means the only problem. Many Asian immigrant parents have a hard time emotionally grasping the bicultural experience their children are going through in school and therefore feel threatened by changes they see in their children (Chuong, 1994; Sim, 1992; Sung, 1987; Terris, 1987). As one Chinese student ponders, "I don't know why, I just cannot communicate with my parents anymore. We seem to live in a different world. Since immigrating to this country, we don't talk as often as we used to in China" (quoted in Sim, 1992, p. 4). Poor family relationships may lead to defiance, frustration, and a sense of not being supported, all of which can affect a student's motivation to stay in school or do well in school. In worse-case scenarios, those students searching for support from a peer group may join gangs (Chuong, 1994; Sung, 1996).

***Parental Involvement with the School***

Studies in the last 20 years have established the firm link between white, African American, and Latino children's achievement and parental involvement in their children's education (Henderson, 1981, 1987; Walberg, 1984; Sattes, 1985; Epstein, 1990). There is a dearth of research studies on Asian American parental involvement in their children's education. Available information tends to be limited and anecdotal, although there is a growing body of qualitative research on the topic (See review by Hidalgo, Bright, Siu, Swap, & Epstein, 1995). It is clear from the literature, however, that Asian American parental involvement with education is quite different from that of other cultural groups. Based on a review of studies on family processes identified as important for school success, Dornbusch & Wood (1989) concluded that Asian American children's school success is not related to their parents' frequent participation in school activities. This speaks to the critical need for caution in applying general knowledge of effective parental involvement practices to Asian American families, especially to those who have not been acculturated to any great extent.

A review of the literature (e.g., Cheon, McClelland, & Plihal, 1995; Hidalgo, Bright, Siu, Swap, & Epstein, 1995; Ritter & Dornbusch, 1989; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Shoho, 1992; Siu, 1994; Siu & Feldman, 1994; X. Tran, 1982; M.L.T. Tran, 1992; M.G. Wong, 1990; Yao,

1986) reveals many ways in which Asian American families attempt to enhance children's school performance: reading report cards, asking children about school, purchasing needed equipment, reducing the number of household chores for children; using proverbs and folk stories to motivate children to study; establishing study times; scheduling children's free time; teaching "the three Rs" before children enter kindergarten; assisting children with homework; creating homework when none is coming from school. These practices, one might note, are not just limited to families that are educated and affluent. Asian parents of all socioeconomic groups typically bring with them a basic trust in schools and a respect for teachers. Findings from studies on various Asian immigrant groups' appraisal of the American education system have been quite consistent (e.g., Blakely, 1983; Cheon, McClelland, & Plihal, 1995; Hirata, 1975; Leung, 1988; Ouk, Huffman & Lewis, 1988; Rupp, 1980; Siu, 1994; Siu & Feldman, 1994). Despite some dissatisfaction, parents, in general, are cooperative with schools, show an appreciation of superior equipment and materials, and acknowledge that access to educational opportunity in the U.S. is much better than in their homeland.

In spite of all this, the majority of Asian American immigrant parents probably do not meet the school's definition of "active parents," as many school personnel continue to equate parental participation in education with parental presence in the schools.

Nonetheless, there are Asian American parents who do not even read report cards or respond to phone calls or school notices (Ho & Fong, 1990). In a survey of over 300 Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese students, Davis and McDaid (1992) found that as many as 72% of the students' parents had not met their teachers, although the students felt that their parents cared about their education. By and large, the degree of involvement is a function of parents' socioeconomic status, literacy in the native language, proficiency in English, pre-arrival educational experience, and knowledge of what schools expect of them. It is not unexpected that less affluent, less educated, and less English-proficient parents have fewer interactions with the school. The barriers are multiple: language barriers, a radically different view of the role of parents vis-à-vis the role of teachers, unfamiliarity with the American educational system, preoccupation with economic survival, inflexible or overcrowded work schedules, and, in the case of undocumented immigrants, fear of deportation resulting from being too involved with official institutions such as schools (Morrow, 1991; Siu, 1988).

It can be argued that it is more important for Asian parents to convey their care about education to their children and to provide a stable, nurturing home environment than to show up frequently in school. However, to the extent that "inactive" parents miss out on important information, fail to advocate for their children's educational needs, or leave teachers with the impression of not caring, such a pattern of non-involvement may not be helpful to the students.

## Educational Risk in the Classroom and School Contexts

Educational risk must be viewed in a context broader than individuals and families. Student achievement is enhanced when the school believes that all students will be successful, adopts a strength rather than deficit model in education, and matches programs to students' needs (Valverde, 1988; Wehlage, 1991). Within the classroom, student risk is minimized when (a) teachers structure classrooms to provide effective instruction, (b) the curriculum and instructional materials are appropriate, (c) teachers are skilled in diagnostic/prescriptive teaching, and (d) teachers can adapt instruction on the basis of evaluation of student progress (Garcia, Wilkinson, & Ortiz, 1995).

### *Inadequate Assessment and Inappropriate Placement and Evaluation*

Several school-related problems in the process of assessment and placement can place Asian American students at risk. For example, M. Dao (1991) describes the school's tendency to change too quickly a student's status from LEP to FEP. Because teachers and counselors charged with assessments often do not understand the problems of second language acquisition, students may be misclassified. Without accurate classification, miseducation may be the result. Berman (1992) identifies the lack of any coherent statewide methods to assess the academic progress of students in various school sites using different models as another problem. A third problem lies in unrealistic expectations on the part of the school system, the receiving community, and the refugee parents and students themselves (Blakely, 1984). In Blakely's exploratory study of the initial interactions between Southeast Asian refugees and the school and community in Oregon, the school system's goals were to keep everything running smoothly by making new students fit into existing ESL/bilingual education programs. Refugee high school students who could not fit into existing classes often resisted being placed with "losers and crazies" — students in special education classes.

One result of inappropriate placement is the lack of challenge for students. Hmong students in one study consistently said that they were not given enough homework, and that classroom work was not challenging. The truth was that low expectations and exclusive reliance on standardized test scores on the school's part led to the placement of many Hmong students in ESL, low level, non-college track classes, where they earned high GPAs, something that will not guarantee Hmong students access to higher education (Walker-Moffat, 1992).

The study of Southeast Asian children in La Playa, California (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990) revealed that not only did Hmong students fail to get adequate language

instruction, but that some were misplaced in programs for the learning disabled, solely on account of their limited English proficiency. One intriguing yet disturbing finding from a San Diego study is that Southeast Asian students have higher GPAs than other racial groups, yet lower achievement scores on California's Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills. Higher grades received in school may not be a function of how much these students have learned but of teacher attitude. The researchers speculated that either teachers wanted to reward Asian students for their hard work or they stereotyped all Asian students as achievers (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Caution in interpreting grade point averages is called for. Given the reluctance of many immigrant parents to challenge educators' decisions, school personnel must take great care not to misuse their power in making placement and other decisions affecting students and their families.

***Grade Retention Policies and Practices***

School policies for students not performing at grade level include promotion without remediation, promotion with remediation, retention without remediation, and retention with remediation. A review of research has shown a strong link between dropping out and retention without remediation (Bachman, 1971; Roderick, 1994). The risk of dropping out increases substantially when a student repeats more than one grade and thus becomes much older than the rest of the class, which could lead to embarrassment and discouragement (First & Carrera, 1988). Research also indicates that students do better when promoted and given additional assistance (Roderick, 1994). Due to the lack of English proficiency or illiteracy in their home language, Asian American students who immigrate to this country as teenagers and who are not enrolled in bilingual programs, often find themselves either promoted to the next grade in spite of poor performance or retained in the same grade. The school's promotion/retention policy can, therefore, contribute to the risk of dropping out or of being undereducated.

***Quality of Instruction by Trained and/or Bilingual Staff***

The critical shortage of trained bilingual teachers, teacher's aides, and counselors must be considered as one of the systemic factors contributing to the educational risk among LEP Asian American students. The shortage is particularly acute for Mien-speaking, Khmer-speaking, and Laotian-speaking students. Another staffing issue is school personnel who are poorly informed when it comes to cultural practices and values of various Asian American ethnic groups (Peters, 1988; Rhode Island School Department of Education, 1989; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992).

Unfortunate consequences of inadequate school personnel include poor quality of ESL instruction, teachers not following curriculum parallel to that of the English monolingual students in all the academic areas, and failure to make use of students' cultural strengths. A case in point is that among the Hmong, group identity takes precedence over individual identities; based on a belief that is wrong to compete with fellow Hmong, Hmong students do best in cooperative situations involving analyzing problems together and sharing answers (Walker-Moffat, 1992). Students learn less effectively when teachers do not adapt their pedagogy to cultural differences.

***Inadequacy of Orientation and Parent Involvement Programs***

> Many Asian American immigrant students and their parents arrive in this country with little background to help them understand American public school systems. Many have very little previous education, and what formal education they have received has been in a very different setting and in schools with a completely different structure and culture from those they find in America. Too often these students are dumped in our classrooms with little or no preparation, and their parents are given no help in understanding how our school system works and little opportunity to participate in making decisions about their children's education.
>
> (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992)

The above quote from a recent report on civil rights issues facing Asian Americans in the 1990s captures well the challenges faced by recent Asian immigrant students and their families in the area of education. Earlier, we discussed characteristics and attitudes of Asian immigrant parents that make it difficult for them to interact closely with the school. School personnel sometimes inadvertently put up barriers too, through cultural insensitivity, no welcoming signs, no translation or interpretation, poor outreach and follow-up, and lack of respect (Hidalgo, Bright, Siu, Swap, & Epstein, 1995; Kiang & Lee, 1993). When Asian immigrant parents do show up in school meetings to give input, they do not always feel their concerns are being listened to, as illustrated by this quote by a staff member of the Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association of Philadelphia:

> At every meeting the parents attend, instead of the school taking their advice, they give advice. Sometimes the school asks them to sit on the advisory board. Instead of the parents giving advice to the school personnel, the school personnel advises them, a lot of times. And that is just confusing, and most frustrating.
>
> (Yang Sam cited in First & Carrera, 1988, p. 75)

***Racial and Social Climate in School***

A large proportion (63%) of Vietnamese, Hmong, and Korean elementary and secondary students surveyed by Hirayama (1985) reported that American students were mean

to them. Although most of them also indicated that they liked school, those who did not like school cited a lack of friends in school and being insulted or laughed at by classmates as two of three reasons. (Difficulty in comprehending what the teachers said was the third reason.) These findings were echoed in a survey of 311 Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese 10th and 11th grade students in San Diego (Davis & McDaid, 1992). Again, while most of them viewed their school experience in a positive way, it was disconcerting that a large proportion of them felt prejudice and discrimination from other students, and to a lesser extent, from their teachers. Counselors were less likely to be perceived as unfair. This finding is echoed in Sung's study (1996), in which the Filipino, Cambodian, and Mien-Lao middle school students in the East Bay (California) were highly critical of the school environment: "teachers who don't teach...don't care about Black and Asian kids...they are hostile and prejudiced" (p. 19).

L.N. Huang's study (1989) of 51 Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cambodian refugee school-age children found that the two most commonly mentioned concerns of these children were physical altercations with peers in school and social interactions with peers. Surprisingly, concern with language and cognitive difficulties was minimal. One disturbing finding from the study of Hmong children in La Playa Elementary School, California (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990) was the insensitivity of school personnel, leading to a sense of disengagement felt by these children.

Racial tension in public schools that Asian American students attend has also been documented by other studies using a variety of data collection strategies (Davis & McDaid, 1992; First & Carrera, 1988; L.N. Huang, 1989; Olsen, 1988; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988; Sim, 1995). Apparently, racial incidents begin as early as elementary school and escalate during high school. Rumbaut and Ima's 1988 study in San Diego found that overall suspension rates for African American, Latino, and white students were higher than for Asian students, but that the main reason Asian American students were suspended was fighting. Among Asian students, the proportion of suspensions for fighting was much higher for Filipino and Southeast Asian students than all other ethnic groups, including white, Latino, and African Americans. These fights were attributed to cultural barriers and prejudice against Asians, especially Southeast Asians. When teachers and administrators were perceived as unsympathetic to their plight, some Asian American students took matters into their own hands. Within the group of Southeast Asians, Vietnamese and Laotian students were more likely to be drawn into racial confrontations than were Hmongs and Cambodians.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1992) sees the negative racial climate in schools as contributing to school failure:

> The pervasive anti-Asian climate and the frequent acts of bigotry and violence in our schools not only inflict hidden injuries and lasting damage, but also create barriers to the educational attainment of the Asian American student victims, such as suspension from school and dropping out of school (p. 97).

In addition to tension based on racial differences, new immigrant Asian American students sometimes encounter hostility from U.S.-born Asian American students due to conflicts in cultural beliefs and behaviors (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Trueba, Cheng, & Ima, 1993; Wong, 1988; Wong & Lopez, 1994). On a much more serious level, racial tension and a hostile school environment may divert students' focus from their studies to less productive, or even destructive activities, and spur some Asian American youths to join gangs — for their own protection (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992, p. 96).

### *Lack of Cultural Affirmation*

Building on his earlier work (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988), Ima (1992) conducted a multifaceted and multi-method study of the effectiveness of schooling for recent Asian American immigrants and refugees enrolled in five secondary schools in Southern California. The most salient and disturbing finding is that efficacy of services was a function of the goals of the particular school the student attended. Students received poorer services in schools that were Eurocentric, or were preoccupied with keeping order. None of the schools in the study provided a culturally affirming environment. Through inadequate bilingual and ESL programs, a lack of teaching materials written in the students' first languages, and ineffective assessment and monitoring of student progress, schools in effect shattered the dreams of a better education and a better future for many Asian American newcomers.

## Educational Risk in the Community and Societal Contexts

In an earlier literature review (Siu, 1992a), I concluded that educational achievement does not take place in a vacuum but in a community and societal context. I showed that the Confucian values embraced by the Chinese, such as closeness of family, a willingness to work hard, and a reverence for education, did not result in high school achievement for Chinese Americans' in their earlier years in the United States. It was only after World War II, when access to economic and educational opportunity became greater and the public's attitude toward Chinese had moved toward tolerance, that educational achievement became associated with Chinese Americans. Over the years, younger Chinese Americans have found role models within the Chinese community — people who have won Nobel Prizes or have made their

names in other academic pursuits. Olsen (1988) associated less educational risk with the more established groups such as the Chinese and Japanese, who have well-developed social networks which provide role models and support for their young people.

***The Model Minority Stereotype***

In recent years, Asian Americans have been perceived by the American public as the "model minority" and Asian American students are often stereotyped as "whiz kids" who are strong in academics. The "model minority" myth in American society is hard to shake. Its tenacity is probably due to the very useful political functions it serves: preserving the American dream, discrediting the demands of other minorities, and justifying the social agenda of conservatives. Some of the harmful effects of exaggerating the achievement of Asian Americans include: down-playing the underemployment and underpayment of Asian Americans; obscuring tremendous diversity among Asian Americans; denying services to needy Asian Americans; pressuring Asian Americans to fit the "model minority" mold; fueling anti-Asian sentiment and actions; and serving as a tool for politicians and conservative citizens to attack affirmative action programs and to shame non-Asian Americans who suffer from poverty and lack of education (Takaki, 1991).

This stereotype must be considered one of the risk factors in the societal context as it retards the growth of programs for Asian American students and, as we have seen, discourages Asian American students who want to live up to this stereotype from asking for the academic assistance they need (S.J. Lee, 1994).

***The Inadequacy of Community Support Programs***

Sim's assessment (1992) of available services for Chinese immigrant youths in New York City characterized the situation as "demand exceeds supply" (p. 48). During a recent period of tremendous growth of Chinese immigrant high school students, not only have youth programs not been expanded, but a worsening economy combined with cuts in government funding has led to the downsizing and even elimination of programs. After-school tutoring programs, a service much in demand, are totally inadequate in number to meet the needs of students whose parents cannot help them with school work. Some programs have had to start charging fees, which makes the assistance less accessible to those who are most likely to need help. Other support services such as work-study programs, recreational programs, family counseling services, and mentoring are needed. Some of these can be provided by the school, some by community-based agencies, and some by a partnership between the two. Similarly, qualified high-risk Filipino, Cambodian, and Mien-Lao youths in the East Bay area of

Oakland, California, outnumbered spaces available in the program called On the Right Track (Sung, 1996).

In addition to establishing programs, the ethnic community and the larger community need to reduce educational risk by offering mentors and role models (Olsen, 1988; Swung, 1996), and need to be willing to admit to and confront the problems of children and youth in their community, including gangs and school failures (Chuong, 1994).

***Interactive Effects of Multiple Risk Factors across Contexts***

A single risk factor, e.g., being from a non-English speaking home, does not lead to school failure if there are other areas of strength or sources of support. Unfortunately, certain factors tend to cluster together, creating a cumulative effect that can be overwhelming to students. Based on an analysis of the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Survey data on the nation's eighth-graders, Bradby and Owings (1992) report that ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and length of U.S. residence accounted for the following significant disparities in reading and mathematical achievement among Asian American students: students from ethnic groups with a longer history in this country (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean), students from upper socioeconomic backgrounds, and those who have lived longer in the United States fared the best. A study by Keith and Benson (1992) found that Asian American students' school achievement was strongly influenced by the quality of school learning, student motivation, amount of academic course work, and amount of homework assigned by schools. Finally, a study conducted by Huang and the National Center on Education in the Inner City (1995) found that students who had more parental guidance and who were more satisfied with the school environment did better in reading and science. Boys, language minority students, and students attending inner-city schools had lower standardized test scores and achievement scores than girls, students from English-speaking families, and students attending suburban schools, respectively.

Having discussed many risk factors in the education of Asian American students, we may say that support and integration seem to be key to reducing risk.

Alva's study (1993) of 89 Asian American tenth-graders found that those students whose educational and social experiences conveyed a strong link between schooling, academic success, and social integration were more likely to have higher grades and higher scores on standardized tests. The importance of support, which can come from peers, family, school, and the community, is underscored in Vulgia's 1991 comparison of at risk students with college preparatory students of all races in two San Francisco Bay Area schools. Roughly 17% of the

at risk sample were Asian Americans. What distinguished the at risk students from those who were not at risk was their perceived lack of social support in six areas: tangible, emotional, educational, behavioral, identity, and socialization. Path analysis of the data shows the indirect effect of social support on school performance as modulated through student behaviors, attitudes, and grade point averages. The challenge is to help at risk students to find alternative sources of support should it be unavailable in one of the contexts, such as the family. In addition to support for students, Garcia, Wilkinson, & Ortiz (1995) suggests that the availability of support systems for families and teachers will increase the likelihood of school success.

To summarize, academic failure within a group is complex; it can only be understood by examining "sociocultural factors, personality characteristics, and subjective perceptions of school and social events" and discovering "how the social context of high schools and other educational settings affect a student's academic motivations and achievements" (Alva, 1993, p. 410).

# V. Intervention

Intervention with at-risk students takes place on many fronts, within and outside of the school system, and involves students, their families, teachers, school counselors, community agencies, and governments on all levels. In this section, we will present a sample of the array of intervention programs that have either been designed within the last ten years exclusively for Asian American students or that have included Asian American participants. Excluded from this review are works that report on programs designed to increase Asian American students' chances of being accepted into colleges or programs for children with disabilities. We will also examine major findings about intervention with LEP and low-literacy students, even though these do not specifically refer to Asian American students.

Because many of these programs are local, descriptions and evaluation results tend to be unpublished reports not readily available to scholars nationwide or to the public. A diligent search has identified over 50 programs, but not all of these will be presented here. Unfortunately, basic information, such as sources of funding and duration of the programs, is sometimes missing. Although the present tense is used in our review, some of these programs may have by now lost funding or been discontinued for other reasons.

The purpose of this section is not to identify exemplary or high quality programs but to acquaint the reader with a range of intervention approaches that have been attempted. Most of the programs have not been systematically or vigorously evaluated; thus any claim of "success" made by the program has to be viewed with caution.

## Programs for Preschool and Kindergarten Children and Their Families

Traditionally, research and programming in the field of at-risk youths has focused on high school students. Because the decision to drop out of school may already be *fait accompli* by the end of 10th grade, intervention programs offered to juniors and seniors may come too late for some. The need for early intervention is critical. In addition, since dropout behavior is developmental, earlier clues are usually discernible in younger children by astute school personnel and parents.

Programs for preschoolers and kindergartners can be characterized as "preventative" or "early intervention," with parental involvement and increasing parental literacy being important components. The most well-known early intervention effort is the federally funded Head Start program. Although many studies conducted over the last 25 years on the effects of Head Start have indicated mixed results, there is consensus that low-income children and their

parents derive many benefits from a program that is holistic — i.e., addresses the educational, health, social service, and mental health needs of the children while involving the parents in their personal development and education (Merchant, 1987, pp. 4-5). Unfortunately, data on Asian American participation in Head Start is hard to come by, making it difficult to discuss the program's specific effects on Asian American children.

A Title VII-funded Multilingual Preschool Parent Participation Project in Sacramento, California serves Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, and Latino parents of 133 young children (Fox, 1986). The chief goal is to enable parents and children to acquire English. To make it easy for parents to teach their children, home visits are made by staff who speak the parents' languages. Home teaching kits are prepared and illiterate parents are given audio cassettes. Evaluation at the end of five years showed that the Chinese and Latino parents were more successful than Southeast Asian parents in acquiring English skills.

Located in National City, California, SKIPP — Starting in Kindergarten to Involve Parents as Partners — is a family reading program based on the belief that parents' and relatives' involvement is essential for helping children do well in school (Patel & Kaplan, 1994). It is only one of four components in a comprehensive dropout prevention program. Chinese and Filipino children and their families are included although the program also serves Latino and African American children. Whereas most programs target only parents, SKIPP extends a welcome to relatives to participate in workshops (conducted in the parents' own languages) on children's literature and to contribute their own stories in the classroom. SKIPP also supports parents and relatives in their efforts to approach school personnel and to advocate for their children.

The Family English Program (Patel & Kapan, 1994) is driven by a belief that learning is interactive, and that the best way for families to contribute to their children's language development is by making reading and writing an integral part of family life. The program, sponsored by the Lao Family Community of Minnesota, targets Laotian, Hmong, and Latino parents who have preschool children. Services include providing daily ESL classes for parents, introducing them to a school-like setting, and involving them in curriculum planning. One distinguishing feature is the use of bilingual community volunteers.

Another early intervention program is the Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians of Rhode Island (Bromley & Olsen, 1994). The mission of the program — to provide a culturally acceptable, comprehensive early intervention program — stems from a belief that mothers' isolation places their young children at risk of development, health, and social problems. The idea is to move mothers from partial or total isolation into integration

with the mainstream service community. To that end, the Center offers a range of home-based and center-based services, including dental and health screening, home management and skill-building opportunities, parenting education, weekly group discussions, interpretation and translation, and referral to Head Start. Utilization of indigenous healers (shamans) and Buddhist monks is a unique feature. A formative evaluation conducted by an independent consultant after two years of implementation found overall improvement in over 100 families who participated in the program.

Though not a program per se, the state of Minnesota has developed an alternative framework for assessing Southeast Asian American students, one that represents a shift in both goals and techniques of assessment (M. Dao, 1991). The framework's usefulness is not limited to preschoolers or kindergartners. The goal is not so much to predict long-term achievement as to predict short-term achievement and measure growth over time. Techniques shift from the usual norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests to work-sample analyses, frequent contact with the child's caregivers, and observation of the child in various settings other than the school. The framework assesses the child's linguistic and cultural background, acculturation problems, literacy and basic skills levels, problem-solving skills, and emotional difficulties. The concept of guided assessment as part of reciprocal teaching also holds promise for equipping Southeast Asian American students with strategies useful in an academic context. A bilingual home inventory (Vietnamese-English edition) is available to aid assessment (Dao & Nguyen, 1987).

Another innovation in assessment of English proficiency of immigrant children is the three-part assessment process developed in the Fairfax County (Virginia) Public Schools (National Center for Immigrant Students, 1993). Unique features include a Home Language Survey, a portfolio method of assessment, and the translation of a mathematics assessment test into 30 languages.

## Programs for Elementary School Children and Their Families

The elementary school period is the ideal time for identifying the extent and strength of the child's support networks, and for ensuring that the child is progressing steadily in all essential skills (Merchant, 1987, iv). Different approaches have been used, some targeting parents, others targeting students, and some targeting both.

Adopting Cummins' philosophy that LEP students are empowered when their language and culture are incorporated into and given prestige in school programs (Cummins, 1986), Project EMPOWER in the San Diego School District is designed for Southeast Asian

elementary school children, offering sheltered English instruction, bilingual aides, and parent involvement activities. Two innovative strategies are peer coaching to train staff and the use of Southeast Asian parents as actors in parent-education videotapes (Olsen, 1989).

Kirkbride School in Philadelphia offers a program to promote school, home, and community communications designed for Chinese, Southeast Asian, and Latino students in kindergarten through eighth grade. This is done through ESL instruction, tutoring by college students, infusion of multicultural content into the curriculum, and reaching out to parents through personal contacts. Parents are given help with supporting their children's home learning through homework in English, a language in which the parents may not have been proficient (CHIME, 1992b).

In contrast to transitional bilingual programs found in many schools serving LEP students, the Pacific City Project in California (Gersten, Woodward, & Moore, 1988) conducts a structured immersion or sheltered English approach with Vietnamese, Amerasian, Japanese, and Thai elementary school (K-6) students. In this approach, all academic instruction is conducted in English but no prior knowledge of English is assumed. Teachers use a carefully controlled vocabulary, and new words that would come up in other classes are "pre-taught." Evaluation results show students to have made dramatic gains in both reading and math.

Although improving proficiency in English is a goal of the Chinese Bilingual Math and Science Program in Manhattan, its primary focus is on improving performance in math and science (Lynch, 1993). The target population is low-income Chinese students in grades 4-6 who score at or below the 40th percentile on the Language Assessment Battery. Major program components include ESL classes throughout the school year, a five-week summer institute, and joint activities for parents and children. Evaluation at the end of the first year indicated positive results in the children's math and science performances, but the objectives for parent participation were not met.

In contrast to the Manhattan program, reading has been the primary focus of Success for All, developed initially in 1986 in Baltimore and implemented since then in 450 elementary schools in 31 states from coast to coast (Slavin & Yampolsky, 1992; Slavin & Madden, 1993; Slavin, Madden, Dolan, Wasik, Ross, & Smith, 1994). The program has several unique features: schoolwide commitment, integration of ESL into the regular classroom, cooperative learning, tutoring, "shared stories," the technique of "story telling and re-telling," and family support teams. The philosophy guiding the program is that corrective actions for learning problems must be "immediate, intensive, and minimally disruptive to the student's progress in the regular program" (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, Wasik, Ross, & Smith,

1994, p.640). Children are not allowed to fall behind. The Asian children (mostly Cambodian) in the Francis Scott Key School in Philadelphia show positive results on reading measures, with Asian children gaining as much as a full grade when compared to Asian children in a "control" school (Slavin & Yampolsky, 1992). Asian children who participated in Success for All in California schools made similar gains (Dianda & Flaherty, 1995). Unlike most programs discussed in this section, Success for All has consistently adopted rigorous evaluation procedures that include "control" or comparison schools matched on key variables. Data to date indicate that the model is successful in raising the academic performance of all children in kindergarten through third grade. Because Success of All has been implemented in most cases without significant additional expenses, it holds great potential for replication by other school districts.

The parent involvement program at the New Hampshire Estate Elementary School in Maryland reaches out to parents of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Latino students ages 4-8 (CHIME, 1992a). The main purpose of the program is to facilitate communication with parents through ESL classes, home visits by teachers, helping parents develop instructional materials at home, and establishing a parent child center.

## Programs for Middle and High School Students and Their Families

Understandably, most dropout prevention programs target middle and high school students, as school often begins to lose its appeal for preadolescents and adolescents. Furthermore, compulsory, free education typically ends at tenth grade (at age sixteen). Certain factors leading to dropout, such as pregnancy and pressure to join gangs, do not typically affect elementary school pupils. Middle grades students, on the other hand, are confronted with peer group pressure, the availability of drugs, and the need to develop an identity separate from that of their parents. Those middle grades students who feel inadequate and alienated from school often see dropping out as an attractive option. Thus, many educators and youth workers consider the middle grades to be the critical juncture in a youngster's life for making decisions about school (Sing & Lee, 1994).

In spite of the importance of the early adolescence period, there seem to be many more programs targeting high school students, especially juniors and seniors, than aimed at middle grades students. One of the few programs for middle school students is Bridge the Gap (Kester, 1991), which is implemented in six Torrance, California middle schools that have a predominantly Chinese, Japanese, and Korean student population. The dual goals are to

improve the students' English skills and increase cultural awareness. The instructional approach is a combination of sheltered English classes and transitional bilingual education.

Realizing that gender has a strong impact on educational risk, the Filipina Career Awareness Program in Union City and Hayward, California (Sing, 1993b) has been offering, since 1989, a program of cultural and personal affirmation to Filipino girls primarily of middle school age. Funding for the program comes from United Way and Sun Microsystems. The program, organized by a community agency called Filipinos for Affirmative Action, has adopted the theme "Care for Yourself." An important component of the program is the inclusion of a mix of U.S.-born and immigrant Filipino girls.

On the Right Track, a three-year program administered by the East Bay Asian Youth Center (California) and Filipinos for Affirmative Action, and funded by the federal Administration of Children and Families, has ambitious objectives: to prevent drug/alcohol abuse, to prevent criminal behavior, to increase school achievement, to increase appreciation of own ethnicity, and to increase parents' capability as caregivers (Sung, 1996). Sixty Cambodian, Mien-Lao, and Filipino high-risk middle school students in East Oakland and Union City were offered year-round tutoring, individual and group counseling, and ethnic activities located on school grounds and in the neighborhood. The counselors were college graduates with ethnic backgrounds similar to the at-risk youths. Based on longitudinal qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the youth and the counselors, the program was deemed successful overall, but the evaluator noted that the most difficult area in which to intervene was academic achievement. Although the program was credited with helping 70% of the participants matriculate, their GPAs plummeted over the course of the intervention in spite of their eagerness to do well in school.

According to Merchant (1987, p. 23), alternative education for at-risk high school students can take many forms: continuation schools, schools-within-schools, satellite schools or annexes, alternative course offerings within traditional schools, or remedial programs intended to serve students on a short-term basis. A variety of programs for at-risk high school students can be found in almost all cities that have large numbers of racial minorities and/or LEP students. Currently, public schools in New York City serve more than 14,000 Chinese LEP students plus many more from other Asian countries. The Seward Park High School Bilingual Program (and Project CHOICE within it), Project AMERICA, Project TEACH, Project IMPROVE, Project GOALS, Project HOPE, Project EXPLORE, and Project BEACON are programs in New York City that attempt to meet the needs of Asian American students, especially those who are LEP.

The oldest federally funded bilingual program in the nation, the Chinese Bilingual Program at Seward Park High School in New York City, began in 1975 as a response to a high dropout rate among Chinese immigrant students. Currently, this program serves 1,000 Chinese students from Hong Kong, People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, South America, and Europe. The bilingual program at this school reflects the maintenance bilingual education model rather than the transitional bilingual education model; the goal is to support and develop the students' spoken proficiency and literacy in Chinese and maintain pride in their cultural heritage (Center for Immigrant Students, 1994). Project CHOICE (New York City Board of Education, 1990c), financed with Title VII funds and now in its fifth year, serves those Chinese students in Seward Park High School and Norman Thomas High School who have received basic education in their homeland, have come from low-income families, and have scored below the 40th percentile on the Language Assessment Battery. To enhance the students' academic achievement and prevent dropout, the following services are provided: ESL classes, tutoring, career awareness workshops, native language arts courses, bilingual vocational electives (e.g., technical drawing and word processing), and parent involvement activities.

Asian and Arabic Mediated Enrichment Resource and Instructional Career Awareness, or Project AMERICA (New York City Board of Education, 1991), and Integrated Methods for Pupils to Reinforce Occupational and Verbal Effectiveness or Project IMPROVE (Guadalupe, 1993), embrace similar goals relating to dropout prevention. The program components are also similar: ESL classes, career awareness classes, family involvement, native language arts courses, and counseling. Whereas Project AMERICA ends up serving Chinese students exclusively (in spite of the "Arabic" in its name), Project IMPROVE includes both Chinese and Latino students. Technological Enrichment and Achievement for Cambodians and Latinos, or Project TEACH (Berney & Adelman, 1990), serves Cambodian as well as Carribean and Central American immigrant students, with a focus on orienting newcomers and preparing students for the workforce. Bilingual teachers and Khmer-speaking paraprofessionals are used in this program. Another component other than ESL classes is vocational education. Most of the objectives, including student attendance, are met.

Several other projects in New York City embrace similar goals and adopt similar designs, but differ largely in the ethnicity of the participants. Guidance Oriented Acquisition of Learning Skills, or Project GOALS (New York City Board of Education, 1990a, 1992), serves 340 students including Asians (mostly Chinese), Latinos, and non-Latino whites. Helpful Opportunity for Pupil Enrichment, or Project HOPE (Rivera & Klinger, 1993), serves Chinese and Latinos with a co-teaching or team-teaching model, using field trips extensively.

To Examine and Plan for Occupation Requisites and Employment, or Project EXPLORE (New York City Board of Education, 1990b), and Bilingual Education and Academic/Career Outreach for Newcomers, or Project BEACON (New York City Board of Education, 1990d), targets Latinos, Chinese, and Korean students. Vietnamese students also participate in Project EXPLORE. By far the largest of these New York City projects is Project BEACON, which serves 1,087 students.

The economic survival needs and adult responsibilities of today's youths often make it difficult for them to finish high school on a traditionally-run school schedule. To respond to these students' needs, two programs offer late afternoon, evening, and/or Sunday classes: the Manhattan Comprehensive Night High School in New York City and the Falls Church Alternative High School in Fairfax County, Virginia. The Manhattan Comprehensive Night High School was the first regular academic night high school in the nation and is currently open to all New York City residents between 17 and 21 years of age. One of the school's chief objectives is to prevent and retrieve dropouts. Additionally, the "stop-out" curriculum makes it possible for students to leave for a period of time and return. Most of the Asian students participating in the ESL program at Manhattan Comprehensive are Chinese. Through a partnership with the Asian Professional Extension, Inc., tutors are assigned to all students. With the popularity of the night school has also come a number of problems, such as classroom overcrowding and difficulty in retaining staff.

Unlike Manhattan High, the Falls Church Alternative High School in Fairfax County, Virginia exemplifies a transitional high school (Center for Immigrant Students, 1994). Students are expected to transfer from Falls Church to a regular high school after two years. Target populations are older Latino, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian high school students. Using a combination of county, state, and federal funds, the program aims at improving English skills and enhancing academic achievement. Services are based on the premise that language can be learned more easily if it is used in a variety of settings — classrooms, playgrounds, and community, for example. ESL classes are offered between 3 p.m. and 10 p.m. so that students can hold a job. Summer school is an additional feature.

Also located in Fairfax County, Fast MATH is a program that integrates ESL and math teaching methodologies (CHIME, 1993; Center on Immigrant Students, 1994). Since 1991, it has been implemented in over 20 middle schools and high schools in the county, serving Latino and Southeast Asian refugees who have had little experience with formal schooling, who have limited literacy in their own languages, and who are at least three years behind grade level. To accommodate these students' special backgrounds, the math curriculum was

condensed to accelerate learning. Emphasis was placed on small classes, hands-on activities, concrete experiences, and teaching math vocabulary as a part of ESL classes.

The motto of Elgin High School in Illinois is "Education for all." Its bilingual program operates from a belief that language is only part of the problem and that a sense of belonging in the student is important (Sing, 1993a; Center for Immigrant Students, 1994). Target populations are low-literacy Laotian and Latino high school students. In order to provide peer support and give these students greater access to content courses, the program eschews the "pull-out" ESL approach in favor of the integration of low-literacy students into regular home language (either Spanish or Lao) and bilingual classes. The main features of the program are sheltered ESL classes, content-based native language instruction, cooperative learning, Outward Bound and other team-building activities, peer tutoring, and mentoring. Students receive full credit for all courses taken. Evaluation shows that the program is partially successful: most participants graduated from high school, although few were able to transition into mainstream classes. As a dropout prevention measure, students are allowed to stay in the program for as long as six to seven years. (In Illinois, students are guaranteed a free public education until age 21.)

Reflecting a similar approach to Elgin's Bilingual Program, the Remedial Plan for Asian LEP Students in Philadelphia was established to improve the English proficiency of Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Korean, Burmese, and Indian students ages 14-21 (Goodwin, 1991a, 1991b, 1993a; Goodwin & Benevento, 1993b). The program features sheltered English classes, whole language instruction, cooperative learning, co-teaching, tutoring, and a technique called Total Physical Response. Follow-up interviews with students who participated in the program indicated that most students felt more comfortable in sheltered classes, but were dissatisfied with the limited opportunity for interaction with native English-speakers to practice English in school.

Research on successful dropout prevention programs indicates that "individually designed and paced instruction which integrates academic and vocational subjects with relevant work experience helps many low-achieving students bridge the gap between school and the work place. Vocational education programs have traditionally provided a connection with the worlds of work" (Merchant, 1987, p. 29). Several programs exemplify this approach, including the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Summer Youth Program in Oklahoma, the Bilingual Vocational Education (BVE) program in Richmond, Virginia, the Media Academy in Fremont, California, and Learn to Earn in San Francisco.

To address issues of academic underachievement, gang involvement, underemployment, and early school-leaving, Job Training Partnership Act Summer Youth Program in Oklahoma City (Center for Immigrant Students, 1994) has been serving some 300-500 students who are Latino, Vietnamese, and Amerasians since the 1980s. Basically a bilingual summer academy combining academics and work opportunities, the program is funded by federal JTPA funds administered through the mayor's office and the school district's Special Programs Division. It attempts to link school, home, and community by enrolling students in ESL classes in the morning and putting them in jobs in the afternoon. An interesting feature of the program is the financial incentives and the support given in the form of free breakfasts, free bus passes, and money for attending the program. [The value of financial incentive to prevent school failure is controversial. Using an experimental design with control groups and random assignment of research subjects, Reid and Bailey-Dempsey (1995) showed that cash incentives produced strong but temporary effects.] The Oklahoma City program's success is attributed in large measure to close ties with the community, which help with recruitment and offer ongoing support to the students.

The BVE (Bilingual Vocational Education) Program in Richmond, Virginia experiences remarkable success with a very challenging population (Educational Development Center, 1992). Participants are 61 Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Amerasian high school students who are not literate in their native languages and are too old to master English in a short period of time. Out of recognition that these students need to enter the job market quickly, the program, funded by Catholic Charities, provides ESL classes, psychological counseling, instruction in independent-living skills, job readiness training, and job placement assistance. Each school day is divided into two parts; the first half of the day is spent in mainstream vocational classes while the other half is spent in separate ESL and independent living skill classes. Evaluation conducted by the Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Psychiatry found the program effective in substantially reducing the dropout rate among the target population, and some participants continued their education beyond high school.

Although most programs for at-risk youth have taken a remedial approach, the Media Academy in Fremont, California attacks the problem from another angle (Wehlage, 1989). It has already been documented that a high degree of disengagement from the school is characteristic of students who eventually drop out. Based on the belief that engaging students' interest is the key, the Media Academy, a "school-within-a-school," seeks Asian American, African American, and Latino students entering tenth grade who are interested in electronic and print media. It should be noted that this program is not limited to low achievers, although

almost all of them are poor, have personal and family problems, and/or are LEP. Journalism, English, and social studies become the core of the three-year Academy curriculum. Students interact with a wide range of professionals in the media who serve as mentors and tutors. The work the students do is linked to "real" work in the adult world. Concrete products such as newspapers, television commercials, and radio commercials are expected of students. The academy demonstrates a variation of curriculum that is known as "experiential learning." Summer jobs are available to the students who do satisfactory school work. Evaluation of the program showed the degree of engagement to be high among the students in the Media Academy.

Learn to Earn in San Francisco is one of the newest programs in the country (Community Education Services, 1995). After receiving funding from the United Way and the San Francisco District, the program was announced in September, 1995. It will initially target 60 Chinese and other Asian American high school juniors and seniors who have been in the United States for less than four years and who are identified by teachers and counselors as academically at risk, who have lower than average attendance, perform poorly on district assessments, and show non-productive classroom behavior. A small number of youths not in school will also be included. The chief purpose of the program is to motivate academically at-risk teens to continue their education. The program, billed as culturally relevant and client/community driven, has several rather innovative features, the most important of which is collaborations with several community agencies and a city college. Students will receive credits from both the high school and the city college. The underlying assumption of the program is that at risk youth perform better in school when the subject is relevant to their personal goals. Career exploration, homework assistance, counseling, workshops on study skills, paid internships, and team-building activities will constitute the main components of the program. It will pilot at the Galileo School in San Francisco and later expand to four more schools. While it is too early to say anything about the effectiveness of the program's approach, the funders and staff are hopeful that Asian American at-risk students will be better served than before.

Unlike programs that place low-income minority students in separate programs tailored to their needs, both the Literacy Curriculum in Prince George's County, Maryland (Sing, 1993a) and a program in a controlled lab school in Hawaii (Dolly, Blaine, & Power, 1989) embody a mainstream approach. In the Hawaii program, over a period of 12 years, 500 Japanese-Americans, Filipino-Americans, Korean-Americans, and Pacific Islanders from low-income backgrounds received their education in traditional academic programs. A longitudinal evaluation revealed that the program was "successful" — however, the program takes in

students who have average standardized scores as well those with below average scores. Furthermore, the program does not include Southeast Asians — the ethnic group generally considered most at risk among Asian Americans.

The other program which embodies the mainstream approach is the Title VII-funded Literacy Curriculum in Prince George's County, Maryland (Sing, 1993a) This program is designed to prevent the inappropriate placement of low-literacy students in special education classes. Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Latino secondary school students are exposed to a compressed, one-year course that covers the elementary school curriculum. Components of the program include ESL classes, mainstream content classes (math, science, and social studies), tutoring, and parent involvement activities. Evaluation indicated the ability of participants to pass county and state tests; some had gone on to community colleges. In this program, students do not receive "functional English" instruction — apparently, the program defies the conventional wisdom that "survival English" must precede "academic English."

## Programs for Students in All Grades

A number of programs attempt to meet the needs of at-risk students of all ages. One example is the Capacity Building Alternatives Program in New York City (Tajaksh, 1993), which serves 139 Chinese, Haitian, and East European students in eight schools, all of whom are more than a year behind in one or more content areas. The program stresses teacher training and parent involvement. ESL classes are offered and a number of activities are scheduled for both parents and students. Evaluation results were mixed, showing achievement of objectives in some areas. Research design limitations made it difficult to evaluate the parent involvement component.

Formally incorporated in 1991, Touchstones of Seattle (Center for Immigrant Students, 1994) is a comprehensive program based on a holistic, self-empowerment philosophy. Funded by Chapter 1, local schools, and foundation grants, Touchstones targets all at-risk students, Latinos as well as Asians (Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotians, Filipinos, and Koreans) from age 3 to 21. The purpose of the program is threefold: to increase or maintain academic skills; to prevent gang activities; and to reconnect three basic institutions — home, school, and community. Its distinctive features are the absence of a formal organizational structure, staff who consider themselves to be co-workers with students, and year-round wrap-around services (ESL classes, tutoring for students, adult literacy for parents, a summer leadership program, translation services, and a Parent Training Information Center). A program within Touchstones, the Multicultural Youth Action Council, is geared specifically toward preventing

alcohol, and drug abuse and gang involvement (Kaplan & Sing, 1994). Since 1992, in collaboration with other youth organizations, it has been offering mentoring, advocacy, literacy, and family involvement activities to youths ages 14 to 23 and their parents.

Evaluation conducted by the University of Washington Center for the Study and Teaching of At risk Students revealed positive effects for program participants. Unlike most programs for at-risk students that focus on providing direct educational/social services, Touchstones advocates for system changes and school reform as well.

Earlier in this paper, the risk factor of emotional trauma among Southeast Asian students was noted. The Metropolitan Indochinese Children and Adolescents Services (MICAS) addresses primarily mental health issues presented by children and families from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Almeida, 1992). Since 1984, it has been providing in-school, multiple-site student support services. Besides individual counseling by counselors speaking the children's native languages, the program also provides non-clinical services such as school orientation, built-in ESL class discussions on cultural diversity, and after-school activities. The spirit of collaboration between the school and the agency is a unique feature of this program. Any school that wants to be a host school to MICAS must commit for at least one year, designate a staff liaison to MICAS, and agree to common protocols and guidelines for crisis intervention.

As noted earlier, systemic factors such as poorly prepared teachers, stereotyping of students, and a negative racial school climate also contribute to the problem of Asian American school failure. A recently published manual on how communities and schools can improve education for immigrant students, *Achieving the Dream*, includes some exemplary programs (National Center for Immigrant Students, 1993). The Ferndale Board of Education in Ferndale, Michigan, for example, has developed a Human Dignity Policy with appropriate consequences for staff and students who insult, degrade, or stereotype others.

## Family Involvement Programs for Parents in Elementary and Secondary Schools

In a discussion of pupils at risk, Kurtz (1988) and Kurtz and Barth (1989) point to work with parents as the cornerstone of intervention, as the family is often the key to understanding and resolving the students' academic problems. Although a parent involvement component is almost standard fare in dropout prevention programs and programs specifically serving immigrant and LEP students, we will highlight a sample of programs that place a special focus on family involvement. "Family involvement" is a general term that encompasses a myriad of

activities, from discussion groups that enhance parenting skills to classes that meet parents' own educational needs and interests; from joint seminars between parents and educators to home visiting programs (Swap, 1993, pp. 122-127). All family involvement programs for immigrant parents, however, embrace one or both of these goals: to improve the English literacy skills of the parents and to help make parents more informed consumers, stronger advocates, and more active participants in their children's educational processes. In some ways, the two goals are complementary, as it is difficult to be a consumer, advocate, and participant without reading, writing, and speaking English.

Blakely (1983) reports on a program geared toward promoting better home-school communication between Southeast Asian refugee parents and a school district in Oregon. The program arranges for parents to visit ESL classes, and organizes cultural celebrations. In addition, when telephone conversations or written notices are inappropriate, a bilingual liaison team makes home visits to the families to straighten out conflicting student records or clarify school policies.

An example of programs that primarily address the parents' literacy needs is FELP (Family English Literacy Program) in New York City (Center for Immigrant Students, 1994). Begun in 1992 with Title VII grants, FELP has served more than 150 parents and relatives of Chinese and Latino high school students. Families meet twice a week in school to learn ESL conversation and writing. In addition, parents and relatives attend a course called "Parent, Child, and the School" to learn about school systems in New York City and the United States. Attendance during the first year was as high as 85%. Another program is the Family Literacy Program for Asian and Latino parents of elementary school students in the San Francisco Unified School District (Olsen, 1989). The purpose of the program is to maximize parents' participation in their children's schooling. Improving communication between schools and parents is achieved through ESL classes for parents and monthly discussion groups on major school issues. The Filipino Organizing Parent Committee Project in Daly City, California exemplifies a program which emphasizes speaking out on school issues (Olsen, 1989).

The LEP Parent Involvement Project in Minnesota (Pecoraro & Phommasouvanh, 1991) is sponsored jointly by two state agencies: the Department of Education and the Office of Community and Adult Basic Education. The project's goal is to help LEP Latino, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Hmong parents to see themselves as active participants in their children's education. To achieve this goal, ESL classes, parent groups, and publications in the parents' home languages are offered. Serving a similar population as the Minnesota program as well as Chinese families, the Garvey School District Parent Involvement Project in Rosemead, California (Olsen, 1989) works in conjunction with the Asian Bilingual Advisory

Committee of the district. A major feature is a Parent Summer Institute offered to LEP parents in 13 schools and taught by a bilingual staff.

Family involvement and empowerment programs are sometimes sponsored by community agencies. For example, ARC Associates in Oakland, California runs parent institutes that train parents from various cultural backgrounds to develop the skills necessary for more effective involvement in their children's education. These institutes are always conducted in the parents' primary languages. Another service offered by ARC Associates is mediation. The agency's Bilingual Ombudsman Program intervenes on behalf of LEP students and parents who experience difficulties communicating with school district personnel about discipline and academic performance.

One of the most successful information and referral services set up by and for Chinese American parents is the Chinese American Parents' Association of New York City, which has a membership of over 800 in seven districts. The Association's hotline handles over 1,500 calls per year from immigrant parents. Working closely with the schools, the Association offers orientations to the United States and New York City public school systems and disseminates information on testing. Although this particular group was not established by school personnel, it shows how a grassroots parents' group can function as a partner of the school.

Given the complexities of the problem of at-risk students, family involvement alone is unlikely to significantly reduce the number of dropouts or undereducated Asian American students. Nevertheless, the recent establishment of the National Asian Family/School Partnership Project underscores the importance of this component. The first nationwide project with a focus on Asian American families and education, this three-year project involves six cities. One of the goals of the project is "to support the school success of Asian students in selected communities by providing training, networking assistance, and other resources to both schools and community-based organizations that serve Asian students and their families" (Center for Immigrant Students, 1994, Appendix A; Te, 1993).

In addition to programs outlined above, there have been many pedagogical resources and background materials designed for teachers of LEP Asian American students. Examples include a handbook published by the Maryland State Department of Education for teaching pre- and semi-literate Laotian and Cambodian adolescents to read (Hancock, DeLorenzo, & Ben-Barka, 1983), and a series of handbooks published by the California State Department of Education for teachers of Chinese-speaking, Korean-speaking (California State Department of Education, 1992), Khmer-speaking, Hmong-speaking (Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, & Yang,

1988), Lao-speaking (Bournkeo, Inthavong, Luangpraseut, & Soukbandith, 1989), and Vietnamese-speaking students (California State Department of Education, 1982).

It is apparent that Asian American students should have a variety of needs met in order to achieve school success. Olsen (1989) has identified some of these needs for immigrant students in general: orientation and assessment programs, programs that help bridge their cultural differences, programs that improve the racial climate in schools, programs that train teachers, curricula that are sensitive to diverse cultures, and outreach and support efforts to keep parents involved and informed. Although the Lau v. Nichols Supreme Court decision (Wang, 1976) already established the right of students to receive instruction in their home language, ineffective and inadequate bilingual and second-language instruction continue to be a problem for many Asian American students. Dufresne (1992) argues that the prevailing mainstreaming model of education simply does not fit many Asian refugee students' needs, and that sheltered content area classes will reduce the problem of undereducating these youths.

## Current Knowledge of Programs for LEP and Low-Literacy Students

There is a substantial knowledge base on the education of LEP and low-literacy students. The research findings and recommendations discussed below do not specifically address Asian American students, but they are pertinent because a large proportion of Asian American at-risk students are either LEP or low-literacy or both.

Miseducation of low-literacy students is quite common in U.S. public schools (V.W. Lee, 1993). Such students either float along in bilingual classrooms or ESL pull-out programs until they are 21, or they are placed in special education classes. Walsh (1991) points out that older low-literacy language minority students *can* be educated through creative school practices, programs, and policies. Based on existing research and her own work with these student populations, she makes 26 recommendations, including the following: voluntary student enrollment; ungraded program structure with a class size of no more than 15 students; individual learning plans; full credit towards diploma requirements for successful completion of literacy and content area classes; alternative ways of gaining credit such as independent studies and community-based projects; voluntary rather than arbitrary teacher assignments; a designated literacy program classroom for each language group; a common planning period for bilingual and ESL teachers; comprehensive support services; and occupational awareness and a hands-on vocational component — a program that permits academic study in the morning and job training in the afternoon, with flexible scheduling that offers evening classes and a summer component.

After reviewing 15 exemplary elementary schools and 27 secondary schools in California that serve LEP students, researchers from BW Associates of Berkeley (Berman, 1992) concluded that "the true effectiveness of the several pedagogical models cannot be accurately determined" (Berman, 1992, p. 1); thus they could not recommend the "best" approach to educating LEP students. However, they stated that high-quality education for LEP students should have the following four characteristics: (1) flexibility in program options and teaching strategies in order to meet students' needs; (2) coordination that enables teachers to work together in teams, sharing planning and teaching assignments; (3) cultural validation that enhances LEP students' participation; and (4) a shared vision held by the principal, staff, teachers, parents, and community.

Also worth noting are the criteria McKay (1988) provides for making decisions about programs. After giving a full and excellent discussion of the pros and cons of each of the five educational alternatives for LEP students — submersion, pull-out ESL, bilingual education, immersion, and two-way bilingual programs — McKay concludes that there are pros and cons to every option. She therefore recommends that the choice be based on considerations of availability of funds, of trained staff and community support, and of school district demographics. Her list of criteria for evaluating the language education alternatives may also be applicable to weighing alternatives for various kinds of programs serving Asian American at-risk students: (a) feasibility (does the alternative place unrealistic demands on school administrators and classroom teachers?); (b) impact on students (does the alternative meet the personal, educational, and social needs of the student?); (c) research evidence (is the alternative sound in terms of current research evidence on language learning?); and (d) theoretical assumptions (what social assumptions underlie the alternative in terms of ethnic diversity and language planning; does the alternative reflect an assimilist or pluralistic model, and a language-as-problem, language-as-a-right or language-as-resource orientation?). Clearly, these are important questions planners of programs designed to serve Asian American at-risk students need to ask themselves.

Thus, despite the apparent proliferation of programs that serve LEP, low-literacy, at-risk students, the overall picture is not encouraging for Asian American students. Based on an analysis of state and local statistics and from interviews with educators and consultants all over the country, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1992) grimly concluded that the severe lack of teachers speaking Asian languages has led to Asian American students all over the country being underserved by bilingual education and ESL programs. The problem is most acute among Hmong and Mien students.

# VI. An Assessment of the Literature

In this section of the paper, we will reflect on the current status of research on at-risk Asian American students, noting gaps and pointing out directions for future research.

Research on Asian American students has been hampered by two problems: the absence of an accurate and adequate statistical database and confusion around the designation of ethnic subgroups.

The field of education suffers from a lack of comprehensive and reliable data on the academic achievement of Asian American students. Due to the small percentage of Asian Americans in the U.S. population, Asian American students are often excluded from national statistics or grouped together with Latinos and Native Americans. Even when statistics on Asian Americans are reported, ethnic group breakdowns are often unavailable (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992). To compound the problem, children whose English proficiency is too low to take standardized tests are often excluded from surveys (e.g., the National Assessment of Educational Progress Survey and the National Education Longitudinal Survey), resulting in the exclusion of as many as 13% of Asian children and an undercount of low-achievement students. Many statistics also make no distinction between U.S.-born and immigrant students, thus reducing the usefulness of the findings. If the database is flawed, secondary analysis of the data may be limited in usefulness and, worse, may result in misleading conclusions.

The second problem is basically one of semantics. Across research reports, there is no uniform meaning of designations like "Southeast Asian students" — some researchers exclude ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asian countries while others do not. "Vietnamese students" or "Chinese students" or "Hmong students" can also have different meanings — they may denote country of origin, ethnic identification, or home language. The term "Chinese students" is particularly troublesome because there are many ethnic Chinese among the Southeast Asian refugees. While these refugees may have a last name spelled in the Vietnamese way, they are Chinese in ethnicity and speak Chinese at home. There are also Chinese who immigrated from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Republic of China, Singapore, or other countries who are not Southeast Asian refugees. It is also unclear whether "Chinese students" in any given study include only immigrant Chinese students or U.S.-born Chinese Americans as well. This confusion makes comparison of findings across studies on Asian American students very difficult.

Bearing in mind these two problems, we can still make a tentative assessment of existing research on Asian American students, using three criteria: (1) sensitivity to diversity

among Asian Americans, (2) balance in coverage on populations and issues, and (3) attention paid to program evaluation.

## Sensitivity to Diversity among Asian Americans

Social workers Fong and Mokuau (1994) propose six questions that future researchers on Asian Americans should pay attention to, four of which are applicable to educational research: Is a distinction made between Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the study? Does the research study separate Asian Americans into different ethnic groups? Does it differentiate between immigrants and refugees? Does it focus on gender differences within ethnic groups?

Using these questions as criteria, we may say that the literature on at-risk Asian American students is mixed. Demographic data on Asians separate from Pacific Islanders is not usually reported as the two groups are merged for census and other federal government purposes. Ethnic breakdowns within the Asian American category are sometimes, but not always, available. As stated before, there is a considerable body of research which clearly identifies Southeast Asian refugees as the focus of their studies, thus distinguishing them from other immigrants. Yet, even within this broad designation, different ethnic groups are often lumped together. A recent interest among researchers in disaggregating data on Asian Americans is a welcome trend.

## Balance in Coverage on Populations and Issues

Spurred by strong government interest and substantial funding, considerably more research has been conducted on Southeast Asian refugees than on any other Asian groups. Haines (1989) even goes as far as to assert that "there is more usable data on the early adjustment of Southeast Asian refugees than on any other immigrant group of comparable size over the course of American history" (p. 20). The research is noted for its breadth, covering everything from demographics to psychological reactions, from school achievement of children to employment of adults. The strong interest shown by educators in Southeast Asian students is understandable, given the documentation that this group is more likely to be at risk of school failure (Folsom Cordova Unified School District, 1991).

The considerable amount of research on East Asian American students (Japanese, Chinese, and Korean) is skewed toward spectacular achievement; there is little research on East Asian American students who are at risk. Furthermore, Filipino Americans have been

called "the forgotten Asian Americans" (Cordova, 1985); this observation is certainly reflected by the paucity of research that explores the reasons why the higher income and educational levels of Filipino parents do not seem to be able to insulate some Filipino students, especially U.S.-born ones, from school problems.

In terms of age groups, more research is available on Asian American students in high school than on those in elementary or middle school. There is also more research available on immigrant Asian American students who are at risk of school failure than on their U.S.-born counterparts.

Although there is research on poor children, handicapped children, and LEP children conducted individually, there is a dearth of research that examines the combined threat of all three variables (Chan, 1983). More than ten years after Chan conducted an exhaustive search on the topic, the situation has remained much the same — there is little research on poor Asian American students who are physically and/or mentally handicapped and LEP. Statistics on such students are virtually non-existent.

By now there is a body of knowledge on the historical experience and statistical profiles of Asian American students; yet research on their learning styles, motivation styles, and effective language strategies remains minimal (Pang, 1995). This is especially true of those Asian American students who are at risk of school failure. Pang criticizes the overemphasis in the literature on cultural values in explaining achievement or lack of achievement.

Along the same line, in contrast to the preponderance of research on personal and familial backgrounds of Asian American students, there is insufficient research on school-related factors — such as perceived lack of teacher interest and high expectations, the failure of schools to address racism, ineffective and unfair discipline, school violence, cultural rejection, tracking, suspension and expulsion policies, course grading policies, and the amount of homework assigned — that could contribute to the dropout or underachievement problems among Asian American students.

Furthermore, not enough research has been conducted to examine how community and neighborhood variables may impact Asian American students and their families. Variables that could be researched further include cohesiveness of the neighborhood or community, adequacy of tutoring and other support services, availability of role models, amount of gang activity, and employment opportunities. The imbalance of coverage also manifests itself in the large number of studies that look only at one or two isolated risk factors — such as the

socioeconomic status of the parents — relative to studies that examine the complex interaction of personal, family, classroom, school, and community factors.

Finally, there is a predominance of quantitative studies of Asian American students at risk, particularly studies which rely on analysis of GPAs and test scores. This is understandable, however, given the labor-intensity of qualitative research in general and the additional burden of the bilingual research personnel needed to conduct interviews with LEP students and parents. Because of these factors, with a few exceptions, the voices of students themselves seem to be missing.

## Attention to Program Evaluation Issues

Research on intervention with Asian American at-risk students is marked by the difficulty of retrieving of information, scant attention paid to systematic evaluation, poor research designs, and an absence of measures of cost-effectiveness.

Because many program reports are written for in-house consumption and are not published in journals, retrieval is difficult, a situation that must be rectified. While we find descriptions of many programs designed to help Asian American students at risk, systematic evaluation data are often unavailable. It is even rarer to see the use of longitudinal designs and experimental or semi-experimental designs with control groups or comparison groups to demonstrate the effectiveness of programs. Systematic evaluation should also include well-designed qualitative studies that focus not so much on outcomes as on process. The virtual absence of cost-benefit studies and cost-effectiveness analyses is surprising, given the pressing need for school districts to justify additional expenses involved in lowering class size, developing new curriculum, and training staff.

Even when available, evaluation results seldom give a clear picture of which particular strategy, or combination of strategies within an overall program, works, with which ethnic group, and at which age level. A large number of programs reviewed in this paper served not only Asian American students, but sometimes Latino, African American, and white students as well. With few exceptions, reports do not indicate whether overall success is shown to an equal extent by students from all of the different ethnic/racial groups.

The program evaluation issues cited above are not unique to the field of education of Asian American students. Dougherty (1989) makes the same assessment of the education field in general. Citing findings from the survey by the Consortium on Dropout Prevention (a group of nine school districts across the country), she states that, of the 564 middle and high schools

surveyed in 1985, only 13% of the programs reported by these schools were formally evaluated, and only 26% had data of some kind. The disconcerting finding was that 61% of the programs had no data about the effects of participation on student progress (Consortium on Dropout Prevention, 1986 cited in Dougherty, 1989, p. 14).

The field also lacks studies that compare the effectiveness of several models for educating LEP Asian American students. For example, we do not have empirical data on whether Asian American students — and which ones among them — are better served by sheltered English or pull-out ESL, or primary language instruction.

## Suggested Directions for Future Research

Two prerequisites to more meaningful and useful research are arriving at a consensus on terminology, and developing a comprehensive database. To facilitate comparison of results across studies, researchers in the field should work on developing a common way of referring to the ethnicity, country of origin, immigration or U.S.-born status, and spoken language of their samples. Every researcher should, at the very least, define vague terms such as "Southeast Asian students" or "Chinese students."

The second need is to develop a reliable, easily retrievable national database on Asian American students with ethnic breakdowns. The database should include information on assessment and intervention efforts as well as statistics on enrollment and student outcomes. While the services provided by the Clearinghouse for Immigrant Education (CHIME) are useful, they need to be better publicized. In addition, a clearinghouse for program information and general research on Asian American students at risk, not all of whom are immigrants, is needed.

Based on our assessment of existing research on Asian American students at risk and on suggestions made by Dougherty (1989), we recommend that the following research agenda be considered by scholars and practitioners concerned with the education of all Asian American students. These lines of inquiry are not listed in any particular order of priority; several may be pursued at the same time in one project or multiple projects.

- We need to conduct research that will go beyond examining characteristics of the students and their families to look more closely at school and community factors that may contribute to a sense of disconnectedness in students. Given the consistent findings that racial and ethnic group tensions in public schools are a fact of life for Asian American students of all grades, we need a deeper understanding how such

conflict differentially impacts the motivations and educational attainment of students.

- We need to conduct research that will not only provide a list of risk variables, but will also pinpoint the most important factor(s) in a student's decision to drop out of school, or specify the critical times at which certain factors can affect a student's decision.

- We need to develop at-risk student profiles that will combine quantitative data (e.g., test scores, attendance) and qualitative data (e.g., teacher observation, students' journals, interviews with parents) to provide school personnel with a more complete picture of the students. The voices of Asian American at-risk students need to be heard. This can be accomplished by interviewing those who have already dropped out to ascertain factors that led to their decision to leave school, services that would have helped to change their minds, and alternative ways that students use to get their GED. Yee, Resnik, Bith and Kawazoe (1995) suggest analyzing the work of Asian American students: "In that work, we will inevitably find suggestions for ways that we as adults can craft better and more inviting educational environments" (p. 9). Perhaps a volume similar to the *Student Voices: High School Students' Perspectives on the Latino Dropout Problem* (Latino Commission on Education Reform, 1992) can be prepared for Asian American students.

- In addition to examining in depth one or two factors influencing school failure, we need to gain a better understanding of the interactions between schools, teachers, and Asian American students. We can use or adapt existing instruments designed for high-risk youth such as the Wisconsin Youth Survey and the Quality of School Life (Dougherty, 1989, p. 10).

- We need to develop appropriate evaluation criteria for programs at various stages of development. Results from formative evaluation, process evaluation, summative evaluation, and outcome evaluation can all strengthen our knowledge base. For established programs, more rigorous research designs need to be employed to evaluate the effectiveness, impact, and efficiency. For fledging programs — and many programs for Asian American at risk programs fall into this category — formative evaluation relying on qualitative data has its place.

- We need to achieve a better balance in coverage by studying Filipino students, the newer population of unaccompanied Chinese students from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and U.S.-born Asian American students. Coverage is often a function of funding availability, a case in point being the volume of research on Southeast Asian refugees. Policy makers in funding agencies, therefore, should be made aware of the paucity of research on groups other than Southeast Asian refugees.

# VII. Conclusion

In discussing Asian American at-risk students, we run the dual risk of damaging them through labeling and accentuating the negative rather than positive. How can we avoid stigmas and self-fulfilling prophesies that often result from labeling someone as "at risk of failure"? To quote Dougherty (1989), "Identifying students as being at risk could potentially do more harm than good if efforts are not made to ensure that such students are not subjected to situations that increase their disconnections to school and their education" (p. 10).

The other dilemma is how we can acknowledge the existence of a problem crying out for solutions without falling into a negative mindset. Impressed by the school success of the Southeast Asian children in their study, Whitmore, Trautman, and Caplan (1989) warn against the negative mindset of government and many researchers, who continue to focus on the difficulties faced by refugee populations.

Without detracting from the achievement of many Asian American students and their families in terms of their resourcefulness, resiliency, and hard work, we cannot ignore evidence that the educational needs of many Asian American students in all grades are not being met. Because so much media hype has focused on Asian American students as superachievers, a balanced view of Asian American students requires a discussion of those who are not successful. After a careful review of the literature on Asian American students, Pang (1995) concludes, "There are some Asian groups whose children are dropping out of school at a rate of 50%, and the effects can be devastating on the economic and political survival of their communities. In addition, there are sufficiently high numbers of at-risk students in certain [Asian American] groups to call for a balanced view of Asian Pacific American students and their families" (p. 422).

Nearly all immigrants and refugees from Asia have dreams of a better and higher education for their children. As this country witnesses growing anti-immigrant sentiments, however, and in the face of often incomplete and inaccurate research on the topic, these dreams can become remote possibilities for many. This should not be the time to discontinue programs for at-risk Asian American students due to lack of understanding or inadequate research. Rather, to unravel the complexities of Asian American student achievement and the lack thereof, we need to build upon and expand the current knowledge base on this population and avoid irrelevant and fragmented programs. Only then can we make the dreams of many Asian Americans more attainable.

# Glossary

These definitions are adapted from those provided in "The language needs of school-age Asian immigrant and refugee students" by S.C. Wong (1987), *Delivering on the promise: Positive practices for immigrant students* by the Center on Immigrant Students (1994), and *Planning for Title I programs: Guidelines for parents, advocates and educators* by M. Rogers (1995).

**Bilingual education programs**: Full bilingual programs include a variety of components: primary language instruction, English as a second language, and multicultural/self-esteem components. The goal of bilingual education is to guarantee that limited English proficient students have equal access to meaningful learning.

> **Maintenance** bilingual programs support development of home language proficiency even after the student develops proficiency in English. In other words, the student gains literacy in two languages.
>
> **Transitional** bilingual programs use the student's home language for instruction in content areas, with the ultimate goal of mainstreaming students into English-taught classes. The aim is not to develop or maintain the student's home language literacy.

**Chapter 1** (same as Title I, see below)

**ESL** (English as a Second Language) refers to the teaching of English grammar, semantics, and pronunciation to speakers of other languages. A more neutral term preferred by some educators is TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

> **Pull-out ESL** is a type of ESL instruction in which the newcomer LEP students are taken out of their regular classes for a certain number of hours each week to receive lessons as a group. The focus is to master the English language, not to help the students learn content subjects.
>
> **Content-based ESL** is an approach that teaches English through content area subject matter with the goal of helping LEP students progress academically rather than being slowed down in their academic learning due to their limited English proficiency.
>
> **Sheltered English instruction** is neither English submersion nor primary language education. It involves a special method of making core academic subject matter accessible to those LEP students who are learning English but not yet fluent in it.

**FEP** (Fluent English Proficient) is a general term used to refer to individuals who are fluent and literate in English. They are not necessarily native speakers of English. Each state or district has its own criteria for switching students from the category of LEP to the category of FEP.

**LEP** (Limit English Proficient) is a general term used to refer to individuals who are neither fluent nor literate in English, although each state or district has also a specific and official definition.

**Low-literacy** refers to the state of having severe difficulty in reading and writing. Different states have different criteria for the designation of "low-literacy." For some states, low-literacy students refer to those students between 9 and 21 years of age who are three years or more below their age-appropriate grade level.

**Primary language instruction** involves two dimensions: (a) instruction in the student's home language to develop proficiency and literacy in it; (b) the use of the home language to teach the same content that English-speaking students learn in English.

**Submersion** involves placing LEP students into a class of predominantly or exclusively native speakers of English and leaving these LEP students to their own devices to "pick up" the new language. English is the only language used in instruction.

**Title I** refers to the provisions in the 1994 reauthorization of the 1988 Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). Title I funds are given to schools with a large concentration of children from low income families. All Title I programs must have a parent involvement policy.

**Title VII** of the 1967 Elementary and Secondary Schools Education Act and the 1988 Improving America's Schools Act makes grants available to school districts and universities for programs for LEP students and literacy programs for families.

# Page Index to Asian Ethnic Groups Referred to in the Text

Amerasian: 23, 24, 27, 45, 51
Burmese: 50
Cambodian (Khmer): 5-9, 13, 15, 18, 23, 28-31, 37, 39, 46-51, 53, 56
Chinese: 3, 5-11, 13-17, 22-32, 37-56, 59, 60, 63, 64
Filipino: 5-8, 12-17, 21, 26, 29, 31, 37, 39, 43, 47, 55, 60, 61, 64
Hmong: 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 18, 21, 26, 28, 31, 34, 36, 37, 43, 55, 58, 59
Indian (Asian Indian, Sikh, South Indian, East Indian): 2, 5, 7, 12-15, 17, 21, 29, 50
Japanese: 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11-17, 26, 29, 39, 40, 45, 46, 60
Korean: 5-9, 15-17, 29, 36, 40, 46, 49, 50, 60
Laotian (Lao): 5-9, 17, 19, 25, 26, 28, 30, 31, 37, 43, 49, 50, 55, 56
Mien: 7, 8, 15, 21, 30, 58
Pakistani: 5, 9, 12
Sino-Vietnamese: 8, 31, 33
Southeast Asian: 2, 5, 7, 8, 15-25, 27-28, 30, 34-37, 43-45, 48, 49, 54, 55, 59, 60, 63-65
Thai: 5, 22, 45
Vietnamese: 4, 5, 7-9, 15-18, 21, 24, 25, 27-31, 33, 36, 37, 43, 45, 46, 49-51, 53, 55, 59

# Page Index to Intervention Programs


ARC Associates, California: 56
Bilingual Vocational Education, Virginia: 50-51
Bridge the Gap, California: 46
Capacity Building Alternatives Program, New York: 53
Chinese American Parents' Association, New York: 56
Chinese Bilingual Math and Science Program, New York: 45
Controlled Lab School, Hawaii: 52
Elgin School, Illinois: 49
Falls Church Alternative High School, Virginia: 49
Family English Program, Minnesota: 43
FELP (Family English Literacy Program), New York: 55
Family Literacy Program for Asian and Latino Parents, California: 55
Fast MATH, Virginia: 49
Filipina Career Awareness Program, California: 47
Filipino Organizing Parent Committee Project, California: 55
Garvey School District Parent Involvement Project, California: 55
Head Start, various states: 42-44
Home School Communication, Oregon: 55
Human Dignity Policy, Ferndale Board of Education, Michigan: 54
Job Training Partnership Act Summer Youth Program, Oklahoma: 51
Kirkbride School, Pennsylvania: 45
Learn to Earn, California: 50, 52
LEP Parent Involvement Project, Minnesota: 55
Literacy Curriculum in Prince George's County, Maryland: 52, 53
Manhattan Comprehensive Night High School, New York: 49
Media Academy, California: 50-52
MICAS (Metropolitan Indochinese Children and Adolescent Services), Massachusetts: 54
Multilingual Preschool Parent Participation Project, California: 43
National Asian Family/School Partnership Project: 56
New Hampshire Estate Elementary School Parent Involvement Program: 46
On the Right Track, California: 40, 47
Pacific City Project, California: 45
Project AMERICA, New York: 47, 48
Project BEACON, New York: 47, 49
Project CHOICE, New York: 47, 48
Project EMPOWER, California: 44
Project EXPLORE, New York: 47-49
Project GOALS, New York: 47, 48
Project HOPE, New York: 47, 48
Project IMPROVE, New York: 47, 48
Project TEACH, New York: 47, 48
Remedial Plan for Asian LEP Students, Pennsylvania: 50
Seward Park High School Bilingual Program, New York: 47, 48
Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians, Rhode Island: 43
SKIPP (Starting in Kindergarten to Involve Parents as Partners), California: 43
Success for All, various states: 45, 46
Touchstones, Washington: 53, 54

# References


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